

The Ground of True Assurance, the Inward Evidences

WCF 18.2 - "This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, **the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made...**"

Introduction: One of the 5 major errors the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands responded to at the great Synod of Dort from 1618-1619 was the idea that God's choice of who He will save is *based upon what He foresees an individual doing*. The Reformed Church saw this for what it was - a giant step back towards Rome's false gospel of works righteousness. In their response to this error - the idea that God chooses us on the basis of what He foresees we will do (believe in Christ, do good works, etc.) - they set forth several articles of doctrine regarding what Scripture teaches concerning the nature of God's electing grace. Since the error of the Arminians made election unto salvation *conditioned* upon foreseen faith and good works, using Scripture, the church said that election unto salvation was ***unconditional***. And it was this that protected the gospel of ***free grace***.

When looking at the canons of Dort - there are 5 major headings. That is where the famous "5 points of Calvinism" come from. Under the heading of "unconditional election" there are 18 "articles" wherein the Biblical teaching is set forth. Each of these 18 articles is a very short paragraph explaining from Scripture what it means that God chose us. Tucked away in these succinct and wonderfully written articles of doctrine is article 12, titled: "The Assurance of Election." It reads as follows:

Article 12: The Assurance of Election

Assurance of this their eternal and unchangeable election to salvation is given to the chosen in due time, though by various stages and in differing measure. Such assurance comes not by inquisitive searching into the hidden and deep things of God, but by noticing within themselves, with spiritual joy and holy delight, the unmistakable fruits of election pointed out in God's Word-- such as a true faith in Christ, a childlike fear of God, a godly sorrow for their sins, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on.

Thus far in this series on Repentance, Conversion, and Assurance we have look at the biblical teaching on repentance - we spent 3 sermons covering Psalm 51's very personal glimpse into King David's heart. We have look at the fact that Scripture teaches clearly that assurance is possible for the true believer, and that God commands us to "be diligent to make our calling and election sure..." **Last week** - we looked at the foundation of the Christian's assurance of their salvation - "the divine truth of the promises of salvation" - looking at 2 Corinthians 1:18-22. Allow me to reread it to you so it is fresh in your mind:

2 Cor. 1:18-22 But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. [19] For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us--by me, Silvanus, and Timothy--was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. [20] For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. [21] Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, [22] who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

This morning we move into the second part of the doctrine of assurance - what the Westminster Confession calls: **the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made...** Do we see the "inward evidences" that God's grace has made us born again and that we are truly Jesus' disciples? Do we see what the canons of Dort so rightfully pointed out as: "**the unmistakable fruits of election pointed out in God's Word--a true faith in Christ, a childlike fear of God, a godly sorrow for their sins, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on**"

Remember, God's Word commands professing believers:

2 Peter 1:10 "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;"

Our passage this morning gives us tests of an internal nature:

1 John 2:3-11

1. Inward Evidence #1: We Keep His Commandments - v3-4

[3] Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. [4] He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Point: It is vital that we look at this entire passage of Scripture - 1 John 2:3-11, as prefaced by 1 John 2:1-2 - which reads:

1 John 2:1-2 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. [2] And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Point 2: What follows here in our passage this morning has as its foundation and context the gracious and full remission of sins that the true believer has in "Jesus Christ the righteous... who is Himself the *propitiation* for our sin..." And what does that word "propitiation" mean? It means: "the means of appeasement," in this case of *the wrath of God against sin*. It is in Christ alone that we have this appeasement - at His bloody and awful cross where He died in behalf of His people.

Application: The true knowledge of Christ - when it is truly alive in the heart of a sinner - when that sinner is granted repentance, the principle of love for Christ and His Law is also made alive in that person's life - so much so, that our Lord Jesus Himself spoke of the bearing of fruit - some 30-fold, some 60-fold, and others 100-fold as **always** accompanying genuine conversion and genuine saving faith in the gospel.

Illustration: One of the most prominent biblical illustrations of a true and saving faith in the Lord Jesus is the illustration of the fruit-bearing tree. The one who truly knows Christ, the one whose delight is in the Law of the Lord and in His law He meditates day and night - we are told in Psalm 1 - that this one "will be *like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither, and everything he does shall prosper...*"

Illustration 2: The Lord Jesus taught us clearly in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 7:16-20 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? [17] Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. [18] A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. [19] Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20] Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Application: There is no greater gardener than God - What God plants, He will water, He will nourish, and it will bear the fruit He intends it to bear. When God plants a certain type of tree, it will bear the fruit He planted it to grow.

Illustration: Even great human farmers and gardeners are pretty good at making sure they plant the right things - even they would be shocked and surprised if their apple trees grew up to produce oranges, or their grapevines ended up producing tomatoes.

Application 2: It is not so with God - If we have been, as Psalm 1 describes us, *passively* "planted by the rivers of water... that brings forth its fruit in its season..." then it is God who will cause us to produce that fruit. Jesus told His disciples in:

John 15:8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Application 3: While our justification before God's holy law is entirely gracious on the part of God and is something we receive not by works but by belief alone - all those to whom God grants true

repentance unto life and saving faith in Jesus *will also become, as 2 Peter 1 says, partakers of the divine nature - the Spirit of God takes up residence within us and bears fruit.* The attachment we once had to self, sin, and wickedness has been dethroned and broken. The reign of self and its brutal tyranny over us - if we have been to the cross of Calvary in union with Christ - that reign of sin has been *shattered.* And where there was once a love for and attachment to sin, there is now an abandonment of sin and a hunger and thirst for righteousness. There is a longing to obey. There is a zeal to be the loving and obedient child to our heavenly father we know we should be. Pleasing God becomes our top priority in our life.

1 John 2:3 give us a great evidence that our knowledge of God is true: [3] *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.*

Added to this for emphasis is v4: *He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

Point: There are no lies that are more potent in their deceptive power than the ones we tell ourselves. Telling and believing lies is something human beings have perfected since the fall into sin. So blinded by our rebellion and sinfulness, man has worked so very hard to suppress what is so painfully obvious - God's existence and authority of him. Man is in the business of self-deception. So foolish are we inclined to be that we will believe that nothing became something, it blew up and became everything, and then 15 billion years later we climbed up out of the ooze onto the shore.

Point 2: *But here* we have something much more concrete. The human being who claims to be a Christian, to *know* Christ - i.e. to have true faith in Him, to have been granted true repentance unto life *will be clearly known by his own fruit* - He will not be someone characterized by lying, by theft, by adultery, by laziness, by sabbath-breaking, by idolatry, or by false-doctrine. And if someone makes the outward claim: "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments:

This person is a "liar."

Application: The knowledge of God is always *effectual* - it always produces what Arthur Pink called: "a complete turnabout of life." It is impossible that someone would encounter the living God and be effectually and *powerfully* called by the Holy Spirit - their sovereign and all-powerful Creator - and there not be a noticeable, indeed a **radical** effect in that person's life. And the Word of God here is telling us that those who have the Lord Jesus Christ as the propitiation for their sins will be *known as those who keep God's commandments.*

Illustration: The great Heidelberg Catechism's third section is called: "Gratitude" - the first 2 sections being "Guilt" and then "Grace." That third section called "Gratitude" begins with these two questions and answers:

Question 86: We have been delivered from our misery by God's grace alone through Christ and not because we have earned it: why then must we still do good?

Answer: To be sure, Christ has redeemed us by his blood. But we do good because Christ by his Spirit is also renewing us to be like himself, so that in all our living we may show that we are thankful to God for all he has done for us,^[1] and so that he may be praised through us.^[2] And we do good so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits,^[3] and so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ.^[4]

Question 87: Can those be saved who do not turn to God from their ungrateful and impenitent ways?

Answer: By no means. Scripture tells us that no unchaste person, no idolater, adulterer, thief, no covetous person, no drunkard, slanderer, robber, or the like is going to inherit the kingdom of God.^[1]

Application: If we say we know Him and breaking the commandments of God is a lifestyle for us - the text is quite clear: we are liars.

James 2:14, 18 [14] What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ... [18] But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Remember: [3] *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. [4] He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

2. Inward Evidence #2: We Keep His Word - v5-6

[5] *But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. [6] He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*

Point: There will be a fundamental change of relationship between the truly converted person and the Bible. The "Word" is the Word of God - **But whoever keep His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.** A genuinely converted person will suddenly take on an interest in what the Scripture says.

Illustration: Prior to conversion, most have very little interest in what the Bible says. There is a marvelous picture of this at the very beginning of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. When Christian first departs the city of destruction for the celestial city, two follow him - *Obstinate* and *Pliable*. One exchange in the conversation between Christian and *Obstinate* is very illustrative of the natural man's attitude toward the Bible:

OBST. What are the things you seek, since you leave all the world to find them?

CHR. I seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away [1 Pet. 1:4], and it is laid up in heaven, and safe there [Heb. 11:16], to be bestowed, at the time appointed, on them that diligently seek it. Read it so, if you will, in my book.

OBST. Tush! Away with your book; will you go back with us or no?

CHR. No, not I, because I have laid my hand to the plough.

Application: That attitude: "Tush! Away with your book..." Such is the attitude of the blind, deaf, and dumb sinner, scoffer, mocker, and unbeliever.

1 Cor. 1:18 "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

⇒ The message of the cross, the message of the Bible, what Jesus quoted prefacing His quotations with the words: "Have you not **read** what was **spoken to you by God**" - has this become in your heart, mind, life, and affections ***the power of God?***

Questions: When you hear the Bible read - does it carry the convicting power in your heart of being the very Word of God Himself? When Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is **God-breathed...**" is that what it is *to you*? Does it carry that authority in your life?

Illustration: There are people in our lives - no matter what age we are - whose words and whose wishes carry *inherent* authority to us. If we are small children, we hear the voice of our father or mother or grandparents or teacher and we know that it carries *inherent* authority. If we are an employee, what our boss gives us to do - their wishes - are our *commands*. We do them because that individual has authority over us and their word is to be obeyed. **Application:** And so *what about the Word of God, the Bible, in your life*. When you hear its commands, do you *keep them in your heart* - do they carry *binding and unquestioned authority*?

When Scripture steps on your toes and alerts you to something - something big perhaps that you've done wrong in your life for many years - do you humbly bow and submit to its authority, or do you kick at it? When Scripture teaches male-headship in the home, do you agree with it and shout "amen" despite what our feministic culture teaches us? When Scripture teaches that using the rod of correction on your children is what you do if you really love your children and that if you neglect that form of discipline you are exhibiting hatred toward your children - **Proverbs 13:24** "He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly," do you accept this or blow it off? When Scripture teaches that women are not to teach or have authority over men - **1 Tim. 2:12** "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to

be in silence,” do you say, “well.... not so sure on that one,” or do you shout, “amen, God is good!” Is God allowed to address the issues of education, male and female gender roles in the family, etc. or are there certain areas of your life where your attitude is: “You can speak to everything in my life except...”?

Final Questions: Do you love the Word of God - do you rejoice in *all* that it teaches - and are you zealous to grow in your knowledge and understanding of it?

[5] *But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.*

Point: When it says “the love of God is perfected in him” it is not saying, obviously, that our love for God is *in itself* a perfect love - if that were the case, we would not need a Savior. But the love with which God *loves us* is a perfect love, and it will manifest itself really and truly in the heart of a true Christian.

[6] *He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*

Point: Not in the sense of being a miracle-working Messiah, but looking to Jesus as the perfect model and example of what a perfect man would be - entirely reliant upon His Father in prayer, entirely confident in His Father’s sovereign will and plan for Him, and absolutely righteous in His obedience to God’s commandments. If Christ truly lives in us, we will be like Him, we will be conformed to His image.

Illustration: God’s word tell us: **Proverbs 12:26** “The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.” **1 Cor. 15:33** Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.” If we have what 1 John 1:3 calls “fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ,” **then we will take on the attributes and characteristics of the Father and of Christ.**

Point 2: Notice v6 says, “he who abides in Him...” In other words, he who is united to Jesus, knows Jesus, and has close fellowship and intimate knowledge of Jesus - how can we not become more like Him? If we tell others that we abide in Him and know Him we *ought* to walk as He walked - in righteousness, joy, and truth.

Final illustration: When my sister and I were very young, my father had a special way of whistling that was incredibly loud and distinct. If we were ever in a crowd or out playing and he wanted our attention, he would make that sound - and my sister and I would immediately stop and look. *That* is what the Word of God does to the true believer - It demands their instant attention and obedience.

3. Inward Evidence #3: Love For the Brethren - v7-11

[7] *Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. [8] Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. [9] He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. [10] He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. [11] But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*

Point: Interpreters struggle a bit to hash out verses 7 and 8 and the discussion of “no new commandment, but an old commandment” followed by “a new commandment I write to you...”

Point 2: Obviously, the command to love is not new. That is contained in the OT law many times: **Deut. 6:4-5** “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! [5] You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Leviticus 19:18 ... but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

Jesus repeats both of these in the NT when asked, “What is the great commandment” - he

replied to love God and the second is to love neighbor.

The newness of the command to love seems to be more so in how Jesus has raised the bar even higher. Hear His words to His disciples: **John 13:34** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; **as I have loved you**, that you also love one another.”

That qualifier: “as I have loved you” is the part that strikes us.

What this all means: When we are adopted into the same family - we are united to one another in brotherly love. Paul told the church at Rome:

Romans 12:10 “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another...”

Point 3: If the old and sinful self was characterized by self-obsession - thoughts confined almost exclusively to us, what’s in it for us, our benefit, our life, our recognition, etc, *there is something radical that changes when a sinner is converted that focuses them on others.* Notice v9: **[9] He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.**”

Point 4: If we say: “I am in the light, I know Jesus, I am a child of God, I am a Christian, and I know and love God,” and yet hate our brother - we are in darkness until now.

What is meant here by “hate?” The verb here is a present participle: “hating.” The verb specifically refers to *hating someone wrongfully - to detest someone without cause.* It is *not* the same as mistrusting someone or discerning someone of poor character. To hate someone is to wish ill upon them - to curse them in your heart - to rejoice at their downfall - to want them to experience pain, hurt, or loss.

Notice also that it says: “...and hates **his brother, is in darkness until now...**” Those to whom we are united as fellow believers - brothers and sisters in the family of God, with God as our common Father and Christ as our common Savior, and the Holy Spirit as our common earnest of our redemption - **we must not hate them without cause.** We must always be “for” one another.

Application: v10: 1 John 2:10 “**He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.**”

Major Application: The third great inward evidence that the grace of God has *truly* converted someone - and a third great ground for assurance of salvation is: *a love for your local church.*

Question: Do you love “the brethren?” When you come to your local church, do you look into the eyes of the people and think: “*these are my brothers and sisters - I want all that is best for them - I want them to succeed - I want them to overcome sin - I want to see them glorify God - and I love being with them and fellowshiping with them!*”?

Something critical to notice in the text: 1 John 2:8 “Again, a new commandment I write to you, **which thing is true in Him and in you**, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.”

Application: The very same love with which Christ loved His people - that self-giving, self-sacrificial love that put our needs and our good above everything else - *that is true in Him and in you.*

Do you love the brethren? Do you love your Christian family? When they weep, do you weep? When they rejoice, do you rejoice? When they succeed and are happy - do you praise God for it? When they fail or experience loss, does your heart break?

Application: Later in 1 John 3:16, we read these marvelous words:

1 John 3:16 “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

The ultimate expression of love is the laying down of your life - not just dying in someone’s place, but laying down your desires, rights, and well-being *for the sake of someone else’s desires, rights, and well being.*

Summary:

Remember the foundations - the divine truth of the promises of salvation. When God effectually calls one of His elect people to Himself through the gospel, they are granted belief in those promises - that Christ is their all-sufficient Savior, able to save them to the uttermost by His cross and imputed righteousness. *And right along with this - the knowledge of Christ is always effectual in bringing about these three internal evidences we saw from our text:*

1. **Inward Evidence #1: We Keep Him Commandments - v3-4**
2. **Inward Evidence #2: We Keep His Word - v5-6**
3. **Inward Evidence #3: Love For the Brethren - v7-11**

How is it with you? Are the footprints of grace evident in your life? In his masterful book: "Studies in Saving Faith and Assurance" the great Arthur W. Pink wrote:

The great majority of those who read this article will, doubtless, be they who profess to be in possession of a saving faith. To all such we would put the question, Where is your proof? What effects has it produced in you? A tree is known by its fruits, and a fountain by the waters which issue from it; so the nature of your faith may be ascertained by a careful examination of what it is bringing forth. We say, "a careful examination, for all fruit is not fit for eating nor all water for drinking; so all works are not the effects of a faith which saves. Reformation is not regeneration, and a changed life does not always indicate a changed heart. Have you been saved from a dislike of God's commandments and a disrelish of His holiness? Have you been saved from pride, covetousness, murmuring? Have you been delivered from the love of this world, from the fear of man, from the reigning power of every sin?"

Pink then cites from

Galatians 5:24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Pink continues: "Mark well it is not that they "ought to" do so, but that they have actually [**crucified the flesh**], in some measure or degree."

The effects of the gospel *always accompany truly believing it*. Justification is by faith alone, but faith in Jesus Christ is always and ever accompanied by every other saving grace that our loving God always brings about in the life of the believer. And how foolish would it be for us to think that a true believe could continue on in unrepentant sin when they know that God is holy - and that it was our sin which cost the blood of Christ to bring us forgiveness.

Final Conclusion: The fruit that grows on the tree does not make the tree good or bad. It only makes it known to other men whether the tree is a good tree or a bad tree. And works do not make a man good or bad - they simply speak the loudest about whether what they profess to be is true or false - whether that person tells the truth or is a liar when they say, "I know him."

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.