

Digging Deep: Exploring the Joy of Systematic Theology

Class 13: The Doctrine of God, part 9

Assurance

"... this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

John 17. 3

I. Some harder Biblical texts regarding assurance & perseverance

A. The "sin" that is unforgivable

*Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind & mute was brought to him, & he healed him, so that the man spoke & saw. ²³ And all the people were amazed, & said, "Can this be the Son of David?" ²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." ²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, & no city or house divided against itself will stand. ²⁶ And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. ³⁰ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹ Therefore I tell you, **every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.** ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.*

³³ *"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. ³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."* ³⁸ *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." ³⁹ But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*

Matthew 12. 22-39

B. The people who are unrestorable

*For **it is impossible**, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, **to restore them again to repentance**, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.*

⁹ *Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of **better things—things that belong to salvation.** ¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work & the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do. ¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith & patience inherit the promises.*

Hebrews 6. 4-12

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?³⁰ For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.”³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 10. 26-31

C. A warning about something that is assured

*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹ For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, **be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election**, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

2 Peter 1. 3-11

*This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.² I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them —³ since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.⁴ For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.⁵ **Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.** Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

2 Corinthians 13. 1-5

Assurance of their eternal & 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 & 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 & thirst for righteousness, and so on.

In their awareness & assurance of this election, God’s children daily find greater cause to humble themselves before God, to adore the fathomless depth of God’s mercies, to cleanse themselves, and to give fervent love in return to the One who first so greatly loved them. This is far from saying that this teaching concerning election, and reflection upon it, make God’s children lax in observing his commandments or carnally self-assured. By God’s just judgment this does usually happen to those who casually take for granted the grace of election or engage in idle and brazen talk about it but are unwilling to walk in the ways of the chosen.

*Canons of Dordt, Articles 12 & 13,
The Assurance of Election, the Fruit of This Assurance*

II. How should we respond?

- 1. We are called to work out our salvation by running with endurance the race marked out for us as we look at Jesus.**

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Phil. 2. 12-13

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith ...

Hebrews 12. 1-2

- 2. We must labor to have a continual, active, and sincere desire to work on what is lacking in our Christian life & character. Though we are not saved BY works, we are saved FOR works.**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12. 1-12

See also Ephesians 2. 8-10; James 2. 14-26; 2 Peter 3.18

Since God has empowered us with holiness, we should relax in the grace of the one to whom we belong - God (Rom. 8:29-30). When I use the word relax, I do not mean laziness. A saved person has been given a new life with new desires & new enabling power. What I mean is "being confident that he who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:6). We should relax because "Christ in us" is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). He continually produces fruit in us, which is the evidence of our true salvation (Matt. 7:16-20). Though the Spirit and the flesh wrestle (Gal. 5:17) and our fruit will not be perfect (1 John 1:8-10) this side of glory, ongoing growth will still be observed.

Fruit (some small, some large, some more ripe than others) will be present because we have an ongoing relationship with God (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). We have been given new desires and goals. We now desire to more fully know and understand Christ and "the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:10). We did not have these desires before true faith. As Paul writes, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Rom. 8:7; cf. 1 Cor. 2:14). Though we fail at times, we now desire to obey God. In this Abba Father relationship with God (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6) we are convicted of our covenant unfaithfulness. There is an ongoing desire for conviction of sin and obedience, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). This is evidence of true salvation.

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