

Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation (Part 2)

Heb 6:1-12; WCF 18.3

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 1 March 2020, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

You might have heard of the British sportswoman, Paula Radcliffe.

For sixteen years (i.e. from 2003 until last year), she was known as the fastest female marathoner of all time, because she held the Women's World Marathon Record.

Yes, her record for the 42.2km stood at just 2 hours 15 minutes and 25 seconds!²

Now, I don't know how her running career started, but imagine when she was running her first marathon – yes, imagine, at the halfway mark, she felt weak and not sure whether she would make it, let alone making it in time. Well, imagine right at that time when she was plagued with such uncertainty, her coach pulled up next to her on his motorbike and shouted at her, “Come on, Paula, I know you will make it!”

My brother & sister, why am I sketching such a scenario?

Well, for this reason... You see, for all we know, Paula did not *need* to hear such reassuring words from her coach in order to finish and win that marathon. However, in the coach's reassuring words there nevertheless sat a blessing – i.e. that, in a sense, *that reassurance* brought the winning line for her in vision!

Now, this is just an illustration – and, for the most part, it's made-up! And I realise that illustrations may have great shortcomings, but here's the link I want to make: You see, Reformed theologians accept the fact that assurance of salvation is not essential – i.e. it is not essential that all believers must have assurance salvation in order to be saved.³

However, what a bonus & a blessing if not a *human coach*, but the Holy Spirit, as God's deposit & guarantee in our hearts,⁴ assures us that, by our God-given faith in Jesus Christ, we have indeed been saved – that we do belong to God!!

As the old Puritan, Thomas Brooks, once said, “...*being* in a state of grace will yield a man heaven hereafter, but *seeing* himself in this state will yield him both a heaven here and a heaven hereafter.”⁵

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. 2: *Salvation and the Christian Life* (Chapters 9-22 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

² Cf. e.g. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paula_Radcliffe

³ Cf. e.g. WCF 18.3 and also Sproul (ibid:236-239)

⁴ Cf. 2 Cor 1:21-22, ***And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.***

⁵ My slightly modernised version of “...*the being in a state of grace will yield a man heaven hereafter, but the seeing of himself in this state will yield him both a heaven here and a heaven hereafter*” (cf. Brooks, apud Van Dixhoorn, ibid:232).

Also cf. “... A little fire will yield but a little heat; a little grace will yield but a little comfort, a little evidence; a little grace will yield a man a heaven hereafter, but it is a great deal of grace that must yield us a heaven here...” (Brooks, T. (1866). [The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks](#). (A. B. Grosart, Ed.) (Vol. 2, pp. 330–373). Edinburgh; London; Dublin: James Nichol; James Nisbet and Co.; G. Herbert).

Or, as another Puritan, Thomas Watson, has said, “(Assurance of salvation) *puts a man in heaven before his time.*”⁶

Well, here are three points to this topical sermon...

- An Unsure Faith
- A Sure Faith
- Carefree but not Careless

An Unsure Faith

My brother & sister, Christians have every good reason to be confident about (and sure of) their salvation. However, so many Christians are not sure – some for a season, and others for longer periods.

So, here’s the question: What are we to make of a faith in Christ that wavers – a faith which wonders whether Jesus really lived, and whether He really died and rose; or a faith which is not sure whether Jesus really died also “for *my sins*”!?

I mean, can one say that a weak faith is still a true faith?

What does the Bible say about this?

Well, there are quite a few passages in the Bible that shed light on this.

Here’s the first one: Psalm 77! It’s about a believer (not an *unbeliever*) in time of hardship.

So, what goes through this believer’s mind?

Doubt in God’s faithfulness! Doubt that God still cares for him.

Here are verses 7, 8, and 9...

Will the Lord reject forever?

Will he never show his favor again?

⁸Has his unfailing love vanished forever?

Has his promise failed for all time?

⁹Has God forgotten to be merciful?

Has he in anger withheld his compassion?”⁷

See? See the lack of assurance?

So, what does the psalmist now do to get back his assurance?

Well, he recalls God’s faithful deeds of the past – God’s faithfulness shown to *him* and to God’s *people*. And in this way the psalmist gets assurance again that God still knows him and that God still cares!

Here’s another psalm – Ps. 88. Through this whole psalm the believer sketches his situation. He feels God-forsaken and rejected. In v.14 he asks straight-out: ***Why, O Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me?***⁸

See the lack of assurance!?

Well, there’s still Isa. 50:10 in which Isaiah tells *believers* – yes, those who *fear* and *obey* the LORD, yet walk in darkness – that they should *trust* in the Name of the LORD and *rely* on Him!

⁶ Cf. Watson (apud Van Dixhoorn, *ibid*:232)

⁷ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Ps 77:7–9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Ps 88:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Here's how God's prophet encouraged them, "***Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.***"⁹

See the encouragement towards trusting & assurance?

What other passage tells of *believers* who are *unsure*?

Well, 1 Jn 5:13!

You see, in this verse John says that he is writing his letter to those who *believe*!

Why does he write to believers?

Well, so that they may *know* (so that they may have *assurance*) that they do have eternal life!

Here's how John puts it: "***I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know (have assurance) that you have eternal life.***"¹⁰

Perhaps you say, "But, Pastor, is there yet another Bible verse which says even *more clearly* that believers may lack assurance re their faith in Jesus Christ?"

Well, here it is: the words spoken by the struggling father of a sick boy in Mk 9:24, "***I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!***"¹¹

Well, so far re Point 1: "An Unsure Faith."

Here's point 2...

A Sure Faith

My brother & sister, like the psalmist of Ps 77 and of Ps 88, so too the Christian might, because of severe hardship, find him/herself in times of spiritual darkness!

However, it's not just in times of hardship, but also in times of affluence and temptation that the Christian might find him/herself in a spiritually dark place.

Yet, even if the spirit of this world confuses us, the Spirit who is from God will enable us to know (to get *assurance*) that the great gift of salvation has truly and freely been given to us by God!

Look, is this not what 1 Cor 2:12 says, "***We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us!***"¹²

See? It is by the Spirit of God who lives in the believer, that the believer gets assurance that he/she does belong to God through Jesus Christ! Yes, as 2 Cor 1:22 says, "***God... has put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing (i.e. giving assurance) what is to come!***"¹³

⁹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Is 50:10). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Jn 5:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mk 9:24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The Greek reads: Πιστεύω· βοήθει μου τῆ ἀπιστίᾳ. (Literally: "I believe!" "Help my unbelief!")

¹² [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Co 2:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹³ ***Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²² set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*** ([The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (2 Co 1:21–22). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan).

Is there another Bible verse that tells us the same reassuring news?

Yes, here is 1 Jn 4:13, “*We know* (we have assurance) *that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*”¹⁴

Of course, just like Pharisees of old,¹⁵ Christians will always want to see some or other miracle to give them the assurance they so crave!

But, according to the Bible, we can have this assurance without some extraordinary revelation. We can have it through the Holy *Spirit himself* who *testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.*¹⁶

Question: How does one get this deposit – yes, the Spirit – in one’s heart?

Well, by the right use of the ordinary means of grace – yes, by diligent & faithful attention to the preaching of God’s Word, combined with prayer and participation in the Lord’s Supper and baptism!

In other words, one gets the Holy Spirit by God’s gracious doing when one is not lazy when it comes to Scripture reading, and prayer, and participation in the sacraments!

Look, is this not why our New-Testament passage says (in Heb 6:11-12), “*We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure* (See the assurance?). ¹² *We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*”¹⁷

See? It’s through keen & diligent participation in the means of grace that we will (as Eph 3:18-19 says) receive power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and ...that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.¹⁸

Of course, a very powerful verse on this subject is 2 Pt 1:10, which tells us that it is through the Spirit who lives within us and whose fruit we bear in our lives that we will *make* our *calling and election sure!*¹⁹

¹⁴ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Jn 4:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. Mt 12:38, *Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.”*

¹⁶ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ro 8:16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁷ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Heb 6:11–12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

¹⁸ “...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” ([The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Eph 3:17–19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan).

¹⁹ Cf. 2 Pt 1:5-11 (especially v.10), “*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in*

See the assurance?

What is the *result* of having such assurance of salvation?

Well, it's as Paul says to the Romans, that we will have peace and joy in the Holy Spirit! Look, is this not e.g. what Rm 15:13 says, "**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit**"?²⁰

My brother & sister, remember what Blaise Pascal shouted out at his conversion – yes, when God worked faith in his heart – faith in Christ? Here is how he tried to put his experience on paper: "Assurance! Assurance! Feeling! Joy! Peace! Joy, joy, joy! Tears of joy!"²¹

And now? What will happen now that the Christian, through assurance of his faith, has such blessed peace? Will he/she now abuse such grace?

Well, to answer that question, here's point 3...

Carefree but not Careless

The true Christian is the one who will not abuse God's gracious forgiveness for his/her sins!

your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

²⁰ Also cf. Rm 5:1-5 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*

Rm 14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit...*

²¹ 1654 A la fin de l'année, Blaise Pascal fait part de son dégoût du monde : *un grand mépris du monde et un dégoût insupportable de toutes les personnes qui en sont* (extrait de la lettre de Jacqueline de Sainte Euphémie à Mme Périer).

La nuit du 23 Novembre, Pascal connaît une illumination qui va bouleverser son existence : *Depuis environ dix heures et demi du soir jusque minuit*, quinze jours après un accident très grave de voiture sur le pont de Neuilly, auquel il survécut miraculeusement, Pascal fit une expérience "*d'extase mystique*". On découvrira à sa mort, un parchemin (*le Memorial*) que Pascal avait caché dans la doublure de son pourpoint et qui relate l'état d'exaltation dans lequel il se trouvait cette nuit-là. Il y affirme la certitude de sa foi et s'engage à la soumission envers le Christ : "**Certitude, certitude, sentiment, joie, paix. Joie, joie, joie, pleurs de joie**". Cet épisode constitue la "seconde conversion" de Pascal.

Celle-ci fut décrite par sa sœur Gilberte comme un double renoncement : à la vie du monde et *ses plaisirs empestés*, mais aussi aux sciences *humaines* (physique, mathématiques, géométrie...) vaines par rapport à la science divine . (<http://www.alalettre.com/pascal-bio.htm> Emphasis in bold - mine)

Yes, the true Christian – the one who has been born from above and in whom God’s Holy Spirit has been deposited – will never say, “Oh, seeing that God has so graciously forgiven my sins, I can now relax my efforts to obey God’s commands; yes, I can now continue to live a life of sin.”

No, as Paul says in Rm 6:2 (and 6:15), “By no means!” (“May that never be”)!

After all, although the Christian has a mind-bending peace because his sins have been forgiven – yes, although the Christian can now be *carefree* – he/she should never be *careless*!

Look, is that not why John writes (in 1 Jn 2:1), “***My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin...***”?²²

So, John reminds his congregation members that they’re now in Christ, and should therefore no longer continue in sin!

But God’s Word goes even further! It says (in Titus 2:11, 12, 14) that the grace of God ***makes us zealous for good works!***²³

Yes, in the true believer, the awareness of God’s grace, instead of creating *carelessness*, it creates an awe/fear/reverence of God!

Look, what does Ps 130:4 say?

Does it say, “But there is forgiveness with You, that You may appear to be weak?” Does it say, “But there is forgiveness with You so that people will ridicule You?”

No! Far from it! Just the opposite: “***But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.***”²⁴

See? God’s gracious forgiving heart is the very thing that moves the sinner into heartfelt & thankful living!

So, what have seen, my brother & sister?

Well, that although a full assurance of salvation is not *necessary* for our salvation, this should not prevent you & me from *pursuing* it and *praying* for it!

You see, during times of excruciation & pain in an endurance race, the athlete finds strength in the encouraging words of his/her trusted coach! And so does the Christian, in the race of life, through an inner conviction worked by God’s Deposit (God’s Guarantee/Earnest) – the Holy Spirit; the Spirit received by keen study of God’s Word!

Is that what you & I do – regular/faithful Bible reading?

AMEN (1975 words excluding footnotes)

²² [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Jn 2:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²³ Titus 2:11-15, “***For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,*** ¹² *training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,* ¹³ *waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,* ¹⁴ *who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works*” (Emphasis mine).

²⁴ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Ps 130:4). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.