

**GOSPEL
ASSURANCE AND
WARNINGS**

Recovering the Gospel



The Gospel's Power and Message

The Gospel Call and True Conversion

Gospel Assurance and Warnings

GOSPEL ASSURANCE AND WARNINGS

PAUL WASHER



Reformation Heritage Books
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Gospel Assurance and Warnings
© 2014 Paul Washer

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. Direct your requests to the publisher at the following address:

Reformation Heritage Books
2965 Leonard St. NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525
616-977-0889 / Fax 616-285-3246
e-mail: orders@heritagebooks.org
website: www.heritagebooks.org

Printed in the United States of America
14 15 16 17 18 19/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Washer, Paul, 1961-
Gospel assurance and warnings / Paul Washer.
pages cm. — (Recovering the Gospel)
ISBN 978-1-60178-294-6 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Assurance (Theology) 2. Salvation—Christianity. I. Title.
BT785.W37 2014
234—dc23

2013050598

For additional Reformed literature, request a free book list from Reformation Heritage Books at the above address.

Contents

Series Preface: Recovering the Gospel	vii
---	-----

PART ONE: BIBLICAL ASSURANCE

1. False Assurance	3
2. Examining Yourself	13
3. Walking in God's Revelation	23
4. Confessing Sin	29
5. Keeping God's Commandments	41
6. Imitating Christ	51
7. Loving Christians	59
8. Rejecting the World	73
9. Remaining in the Church	87
10. Confessing Christ	97
11. Purifying Self	105
12. Practicing Righteousness	115
13. Overcoming the World	127
14. Believing in Jesus	139

PART TWO: GOSPEL WARNINGS, OR WARNINGS TO EMPTY CONFESSORS

15. Gospel Reductionism	157
16. The Small Gate	167
17. The Narrow Way	189
18. The Outward Evidence of an Inward Reality	213
19. The Dangers of an Empty Confession	227

Series Preface: Recovering the Gospel

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest of all treasures given to the church and the individual Christian. It is not *a* message among many but *the* message above them all. It is the power of God for salvation and the greatest revelation of the manifold wisdom of God to men and angels.¹ It is for this reason that the apostle Paul gave the gospel the first place in his preaching, endeavored with all his might to proclaim it clearly, and even pronounced a curse upon all those who would pervert its truth.²

Each generation of Christians is a steward of the gospel message, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, God calls upon us to guard this treasure that has been entrusted to us.³ If we are to be faithful stewards, we must be absorbed in the study of the gospel, take great pains to understand its truths, and pledge ourselves to guard its contents.⁴ In doing so, we will ensure salvation both for ourselves and for those who hear us.⁵

This stewardship drives me to write these books. I have little desire for the hard work of writing, and there is certainly no lack of Christian books, but I have put the following collection of sermons in written form for the same reason that I preached them: to be free from their burden. Like Jeremiah, if I do not speak forth this message, “then...in my heart [it becomes] like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.”⁶ As the apostle Paul exclaimed, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”⁷

1. Romans 1:16; Ephesians 3:10.

2. 1 Corinthians 15:3; Colossians 4:4; Galatians 1:8–9.

3. 2 Timothy 1:14.

4. 1 Timothy 4:15.

5. 1 Timothy 4:16.

6. Jeremiah 20:9.

7. 1 Corinthians 9:16.

As is commonly known, the word *gospel* comes from the Greek word *euangélion*, which is properly translated “good news.” In one sense, every page of Scripture contains the gospel, but in another sense, the gospel refers to a very specific message—the salvation accomplished for a fallen people through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In accordance with the Father’s good pleasure, the eternal Son, who is equal with the Father and is the exact representation of His nature, willingly left the glory of heaven, was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, and was born the God-man: Jesus of Nazareth.⁸ As a man, He walked on this earth in perfect obedience to the law of God.⁹ In the fullness of time, men rejected and crucified Him. On the cross, He bore man’s sin, suffered God’s wrath, and died in man’s place.¹⁰ On the third day, God raised Him from the dead. This resurrection is the divine declaration that the Father has accepted His Son’s death as a sacrifice for sin. Jesus paid the penalty for man’s disobedience, satisfied the demands of justice, and appeased the wrath of God.¹¹ Forty days after the resurrection, the Son of God ascended into the heavens, sat down at the right hand of the Father, and was given glory, honor, and dominion over all.¹² There, in the presence of God, He represents His people and makes requests to God on their behalf.¹³ All who acknowledge their sinful, helpless state and throw themselves upon Christ, God will fully pardon, declare righteous, and reconcile unto Himself.¹⁴ This is the gospel of God and of Jesus Christ, His Son.

One of the greatest crimes committed by this present Christian generation is its neglect of the gospel, and it is from this neglect that all our other maladies spring forth. The lost world is not so much gospel hardened as it is gospel ignorant because many of those who proclaim the gospel are also ignorant of its most basic truths. The essential themes that make up the very core of the gospel—the justice of God, the radical depravity of man, the blood atonement, the nature of true conversion,

8. Acts 2:23; Hebrews 1:3; Philippians 2:6–7; Luke 1:35.

9. Hebrews 4:15.

10. 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; Isaiah 53:10.

11. Luke 24:6; Romans 1:4; Romans 4:25.

12. Hebrews 1:3; Matthew 28:18; Daniel 7:13–14.

13. Luke 24:51; Philippians 2:9–11; Hebrews 1:3; Hebrews 7:25.

14. Mark 1:15; Romans 10:9; Philippians 3:3.

and the biblical basis of assurance—are absent from too many pulpits. Churches reduce the gospel message to a few creedal statements, teach that conversion is a mere human decision, and pronounce assurance of salvation over anyone who prays the sinner’s prayer.

The result of this gospel reductionism has been far-reaching. First, it further hardens the hearts of the unconverted. Few modern-day “converts” ever make their way into the fellowship of the church, and those who do often fall away or have lives marked by habitual carnality. Untold millions walk our streets and sit in our pews unchanged by the true gospel of Jesus Christ, and yet they are convinced of their salvation because one time in their life they raised a hand at an evangelistic campaign or repeated a prayer. This false sense of security creates a great barrier that often insulates such individuals from ever hearing the true gospel.

Secondly, such a gospel deforms the church from a spiritual body of regenerated believers into a gathering of carnal men who profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him.¹⁵ With the preaching of the true gospel, men come to the church without gospel entertainment, special activities, or the promise of benefits beyond those offered by the gospel. Those who come do so because they desire Christ and are hungry for biblical truth, heartfelt worship, and opportunities for service. When the church proclaims a lesser gospel, it fills up with carnal men who share little interest in the things of God, and the maintenance of such men is a heavy burden upon the church.¹⁶ The church then tones down the radical demands of the gospel to a convenient morality, and true devotion to Christ gives way to activities designed to meet the felt needs of its members. The church becomes activity-driven rather than Christ-centered, and it carefully filters or repackages the truth so as not to offend the carnal majority. The church lays aside the great truths of Scripture and orthodox Christianity, and pragmatism (i.e., whatever keeps the church going and growing) becomes the rule of the day.

Thirdly, such a gospel reduces evangelism and missions to little more than a humanistic endeavor driven by clever marketing strategies based upon a careful study of the latest trends in culture. After years of witnessing the impotence of an unbiblical gospel, many evangelicals seem convinced that the gospel will not work and that man has somehow

15. Titus 1:16.

16. 1 Corinthians 2:14.

become too complex a being to be saved and transformed by such a simple and scandalous message. There is now more emphasis on understanding our fallen culture and its fads than on understanding and proclaiming the only message that has the power to save it. As a result, the gospel is constantly being repackaged to fit what contemporary culture deems most relevant. We have forgotten that the true gospel is always relevant to every culture because it is God's eternal word to every man.

Fourthly, such a gospel brings reproach to the name of God. Through the proclamation of a lesser gospel, the carnal and unconverted come into the fellowship of the church, and through the almost total neglect of biblical church discipline, they are allowed to stay without correction or reproof. This soils the purity and reputation of the church and blasphemes the name of God among the unbelieving.¹⁷ In the end, God is not glorified, the church is not edified, the unconverted church member is not saved, and the church has little or no witness to the unbelieving world.

It does not become us as ministers or laymen to stand so near and do nothing when we see "the glorious gospel of our blessed God" replaced by a gospel of lesser glory.¹⁸ As stewards of this trust, we have a duty to recover the one true gospel and proclaim it boldly and clearly to all. We would do well to pay heed to the words of Charles Haddon Spurgeon:

In these days, I feel bound to go over the elementary truths of the gospel repeatedly. In peaceful times, we may feel free to make excursions into interesting districts of truth which lie far afield; but now we must stay at home, and guard the hearts and homes of the church by defending the first principles of the faith. In this age, there have risen up in the church itself men who speak perverse things. There be many that trouble us with their philosophies and novel interpretations, whereby they deny the doctrines they profess to teach, and undermine the faith they are pledged to maintain. It is well that some of us, who know what we believe, and have no secret meanings for our words, should just put our foot down and maintain our standing, holding forth the word of life, and plainly declaring the foundation truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁹

17. Romans 2:24.

18. 1 Timothy 1:11.

19. Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (repr., Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications), 32:385.

Although the *Recovering the Gospel* series does not represent an entirely systematic presentation of the gospel, it does address most of the essential elements, especially those that are most neglected in contemporary Christianity. It is my hope that these words might be a guide to help you rediscover the gospel in all its beauty, scandal, and saving power. It is my prayer that such a rediscovery might transform your life, strengthen your proclamation, and bring the greatest glory to God.

Your brother,
Paul David Washer

PART ONE

Biblical Assurance



Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

—2 Corinthians 13:5

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

—1 John 5:13

CHAPTER ONE



False Assurance

They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

—Titus 1:16

Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

—Matthew 7:22–23

With this third book in the Recovering the Gospel series, we have come to a crucial place in our study of the gospel and salvation. We must ask ourselves this question: How can I know I have been born again, that I am truly a child of God? How can I know that I have believed unto eternal life? The relevancy of these questions becomes apparent as we consider that we live in an age when many claim to have some sort of eternal hope in Christ yet reflect so little of His teachings in their lives.

The seriousness of the matter becomes even more acute because twentieth-century preaching and evangelism have radically altered the content of the gospel, the gospel call, and the means by which people obtain assurance of salvation. Many preachers today now present the gospel as a series of concise, convenient statements that, while inherently true, are often left unexplained and hollowed of their true evangelical meaning and power. The gospel call to repent and believe has been replaced with a call to accept Christ and repeat the sinner's prayer, which is often at the end of tracts and the conclusion of emotional and often manipulative public invitations. Many people no longer obtain assurance of salvation by a careful consideration of their conversion and lifestyle in light of the Scriptures. Rather, it is granted by a well-meaning minister

who is quick to pronounce the full benefits of salvation upon any who have prayed to receive Christ with any degree of apparent sincerity.

The result of these drastic alterations in the gospel is that multitudes of individuals demonstrate little evidence of saving grace, yet walk with the greatest assurance of salvation and respond with the greatest offense to anyone who would question their confession. They believe themselves saved, carry their assurance in their heart, and have the affirmation of a religious authority. They have seldom heard a gospel warning to empty confessors of faith or been admonished to examine themselves in light of the Scriptures or test themselves for objective evidences of conversion.¹ They sense no urgency and find little need to make their calling and election sure.²

A WARNING TO MINISTERS

Many who serve as gospel ministers must accept the greater blame for people's prevalent nonchalant attitude toward salvation and superficial view of assurance. These erroneous opinions and careless attitudes toward the gospel and conversion did not spring forth from a careful reading of the Scriptures or a serious study of the great confessions and preaching of former centuries. Rather, these faulty, dangerous opinions are the result of ministers who preach carelessly, handle the gospel with little trepidation, and deal with people's souls in a superficial manner.

This depreciation and poor handling of the gospel results from the twentieth century's gradual but decisive departure from a serious and devout study of biblical truth, which alone has the power to give men a high view of God, a right esteem for the gospel, and a healthy fear to discharge the solemn responsibility that has been laid upon ministers. Thus, men have traded their mantles for methodologies, prophecy for pragmatism, and the power of the Holy Spirit for cleverly devised marketing strategies. The school of the prophets now looks more like a leadership-training seminar for future CEOs and junior executives. The pastor's presentation of life principles is given priority over gospel preaching, the rapid growth and mobilization of the congregation has become more important than the purity of the church, and the conversion of the

1. Matthew 7:13–27; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Titus 1:16.

2. 2 Peter 1:10.

congregant is assumed if he has prayed the sinner's prayer and participates in the advancement of the church's mission statement.

As ministers to whom much has been given and from whom much will be required, we must guard through the Holy Spirit the treasure that has been entrusted to us.³ We must return to the ancient paths marked out by the Word of God.⁴ We must be absorbed in the Scriptures, that our progress in piety and our usefulness in the gospel ministry might be evident to all.⁵ We must be diligent to present ourselves approved to God as workers who have no cause for shame, accurately handling the word of truth.⁶ We must pay close attention to ourselves and our teaching—especially as we teach the gospel—for as we do, we will ensure both our own salvation and that of our hearers.⁷ As ministers of the gospel, we cannot be uninformed or careless with regard to our preaching of the gospel, our calling people to repentance and faith, and our counseling of seekers. People's eternal destiny and the church's reputation depend upon our diligence and fidelity in these high matters.

We must remember that Jesus Christ has a church made up of those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, who have repented and believed unto salvation, and who continue walking and growing in grace. This church is God's creation and one of His most spectacular works.⁸ It is the instrument God has ordained through which to display His glory and make known His manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places.⁹ The church is an important enterprise, and all of us, ministers and laymen alike, who have been called to contribute to her edification, must take extreme care. We must do all within our means to see that our service adds to her edification and beauty rather than weakens her or does insufferable damage to her testimony. This present threat is what gave rise to the apostle Paul's admonition to the church in Corinth:

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will

3. Luke 12:47–48; 2 Timothy 1:14.

4. Jeremiah 6:16.

5. 1 Timothy 4:15.

6. 2 Timothy 2:15.

7. 1 Timothy 4:16.

8. Ephesians 2:10.

9. Ephesians 3:10.

become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:11-15)

Jesus Christ is the Great Cornerstone¹⁰ of the church; therefore, her foundation is unshakable. As Paul wrote to young Timothy, "The solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His'" (2 Tim. 2:19). On the other hand, we have been called to build upon that foundation with a fear and trembling that flow from two fountains. First, we know that our contributions to the church have the power to strengthen or weaken and beautify or spoil her. Second, we know that we will be judged for the quality of our ministry toward the church. On that great day, the value of our labor will be revealed by fire. Though we will be saved by God's grace and the blood of the Lamb, we may well witness the burning of all our labors. These thoughts should move the gospel minister to be careful in every aspect of his ministry, but especially in his preaching of the gospel and care for souls. If this first stone is out of place, then the entire wall will be weakened, and the church's reputation, which is more precious than gold, will be soiled.

THE DANGERS OF FALSE ASSURANCE

Although what I have been discussing so far is a hard saying and difficult to understand,¹¹ good evidence suggests that it is an accurate description of much of modern evangelicalism. Many have handled the gospel carelessly, generalizing its essential truths and reducing its content to the lowest common denominator in order to include the largest number of professions into a fellowship. The glorious gospel of our blessed God¹² has become a shallow creed made up of a few spiritual laws or principles. If an individual is willing to give even the most superficial assent to this creed, we authoritatively declare him born again, welcome him into the family of God, and place his name on the church roll. Although a few converts are actually converted, far too many either never return to the

10. Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16; Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6-7.

11. John 6:60.

12. 1 Timothy 1:11.

fellowship or disappear from the congregation after only a few months. Others who keep their association with the church often demonstrate a great dullness toward Christ, a frightening apathy toward holiness, and a disregard for ministry. They are not bound to the church by a vital union with Christ but by all that the congregation with its vibrant leadership and programs can offer them: a wholesome community, exciting relationships, a place for their children to grow, and a constant catering to their felt needs.

Because of an evangelical pulpit weakened by ignorance, pragmatism, and fear, the professing church is filled with individuals who have never really been confronted with the gospel of Jesus Christ, have never heard any of the gospel's warnings, and have little understanding of genuine biblical assurance. Furthermore, evangelicals explain away these individuals' lack of sanctification and worldliness with one of the most dangerous terms that has ever come forth: the carnal Christian. It is the doctrine that a genuine believer in Jesus Christ, a person regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, can actually live out his entire life in worldliness, indulging in fleshly desires and evidencing little concern for the things of God. This doctrine is a direct contradiction of the teachings of Christ and the apostles. Furthermore, it opens the door for carnal and unregenerate people to find assurance of salvation by looking to the apparent sincerity of their past decision to accept Christ, even though their manner of living contradicts such a profession.¹³

In contrast to this doctrine, the Scriptures admonish those professing faith in Christ to find assurance of their salvation not only by a close examination of their conversion experience but also by a close examination of their manner of living after that experience. Do they demonstrate ongoing evidence of God's sanctifying work, without which no one will see the Lord?¹⁴ Is the God who began a good work perfecting it?¹⁵ Does the person have fruit in keeping with genuine repentance and faith?¹⁶ Is his profession proven or evidenced by genuine works of piety?¹⁷

13. Titus 1:16.

14. Hebrews 12:14.

15. Philippians 1:6.

16. Matthew 3:8.

17. James 2:18.

LORDSHIP SALVATION

Among evangelicals is a great deal of debate over what has been termed “lordship salvation.” The proponents of this teaching believe that salvation requires that a person not only receive Jesus Christ as Savior but also as Lord. Those on the other side of the debate teach that in order to be saved a person need only receive Christ as Savior; the issue of lordship is an entirely independent matter. Consequently, they argue that to demand submission to the lordship of Christ is to contradict the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone.¹⁸ If a person must submit to the lordship of Christ to gain salvation, then it is no longer on the basis of grace but of works.¹⁹

While I applaud every sincere effort to protect the essential doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, I must disagree with this opinion. I argue that the call to submission to the lordship of Jesus is an inherent and essential aspect of the gospel call to sinners. Furthermore, I argue that a professing Christian’s growth or gradual progress in submission to the Lord Jesus Christ is an evidence of genuine conversion. My convictions are founded upon the following truths.

First, Christ Himself taught the absolute necessity of a sincere and practical submission to His lordship as an essential aspect of salvation. Not only does salvation require a confession of lordship but also a proof of that confession. In the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ strongly warned His hearers that submission to His lordship was the great litmus test of true confession. In His words, the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it, even among those who emphatically declare Him to be Lord: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:13–14, 21).

Christ is not teaching a works-based salvation but rather a truth that runs through the entire course of Scripture. Submission to the lordship of God and His Christ (i.e., obedience to the will of God) is the evidence of saving faith. While it is heretical even to entertain the thought that faith plus works equals salvation, it is biblical, orthodox, and historically Christian to believe and proclaim that works are the result of salvation and a test of its authenticity.

18. Ephesians 2:8.

19. Romans 11:6.

Second, submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ was an essential aspect of the apostolic proclamation of the gospel. No one can deny that the apostles solemnly testified to both Jews and Greeks that God had made this Jesus, whom the world crucified, both Lord and Christ.²⁰ Furthermore, according to the apostolic proclamation of the gospel, a person's confession of Christ's universal lordship is essential for salvation. Here the apostle Paul is emphatic: "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

This is one of the most important confessional statements in the Scriptures. Furthermore, it is one of the most widely employed among evangelicals for the purpose of evangelism. Are we, or the apostle for that matter, merely calling sinners to an empty confession of the lordship of Christ? Are they only to confess Jesus as Lord without any intentions to submit to His will? Can a person believe a truth as great as this in his heart and confess it with his mouth without experiencing any practical influence upon the purpose, direction, and manner of his life? It is wrong to suggest the possibility. Furthermore, we have just considered that any confession of the lordship of Christ that does not manifest itself in the doing of His will is empty and will result in eternal ruin.²¹

Third, the objections often raised against lordship salvation seem to result from a misunderstanding of the nature of salvation, especially of the doctrines of regeneration and perseverance. When the Scriptures teach that practical and discernible submission to the lordship of Jesus²² is an essential evidence of salvation and a means of assurance, they in no way infer that salvation or the believer's perseverance is the result of works. The believer's submission to the lordship of Christ neither causes nor preserves salvation, but rather is the result of God's great work of salvation in the believer. This work is twofold. First, the person who repents and believes unto salvation has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, which is a supernatural and recreating work of God that results in a real change (as opposed to a poetic or metaphorical change) in the believer's nature. The Christian has become a new creature²³ with new affections

20. Acts 2:36; 20:21; 1 Corinthians 2:8.

21. Matthew 7:23.

22. Submission to the lordship of Jesus is synonymous with fruit (Matt. 7:16, 20), obedience to Jesus' will (Matt. 7:21), and works (James 2:14–26).

23. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

for righteousness and a new inclination toward godliness and true piety. Second, the person who repents and believes unto salvation has become the workmanship of God.²⁴ God's continuing work of grace after salvation assures that every genuine believer will make degrees of progress in sanctification. This is not the result of self-will or works springing forth from the believer's own determination but the result of God's work in the believer. He who began the good work at conversion continues working until that final day. Progress in sanctification throughout a believer's life will be evident because it is God who works "both to will and to do" for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).

Because of the Spirit's regenerating and sanctifying work, every genuine believer will grow in submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ and in conformity to Him. This neither means that all believers grow at the same pace or to the same degree nor does it require that a believer show evidence of progress at any given moment. Even the most sincere believer will fall into periods of carnality in thought, word, and deed. What it does mean is that through the full course of the believer's life there will be discernible growth in submission to the lordship of Christ, works of righteousness, and fruit-bearing. The 1689 London Confession and the Westminster Confession agree in chapter 13, articles 1–3:

They who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are also further sanctified, really and personally, through the same virtue, by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

This sanctification is throughout the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of

24. Ephesians 2:10.

God, pressing after an heavenly life, in evangelical obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King, in His Word hath prescribed them.

As if the Westminster and London Confessions were not enough to demonstrate that genuine, saving faith is evidenced by sanctification and the bearing of fruit, we can also turn to the esteemed Belgic Confession of Faith (1561) and its remarkable comments in articles 22 and 24. Here again we see the agreement between the doctrine of salvation by faith alone and the clear teaching of Scripture that such saving faith is evidenced by works:

Therefore, to say that Christ is not enough but that something else is needed as well is a most enormous blasphemy against God—for it then would follow that Jesus Christ is only half a Savior.... And therefore we justly say with Paul that we are justified “by faith alone” or by faith “apart from the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28).

We believe that this true faith, produced in man by the hearing of God’s Word and by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17) causing him to live the “newness of life” (Romans 6:4) and freeing him from the slavery of sin.... So then, it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6) which leads a man to do by himself the works that God has commanded in His Word.

Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, yet the nature of salvation guarantees that saving faith will have real and practical evidences. Thus, those who have truly believed in Christ unto salvation may gain greater assurance of their salvation not only through examining their conversion experience in light of the Scriptures but also by thoroughly examining their life since the moment of their conversion. Although all believers are subject to many failings and can fall before the smallest temptation, their determination to continue in the faith and their gradual and progressive sanctification are great evidences of salvation and provide a solid ground for assurance.