



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 7.4.7 – The Doctrine of the Way of Salvation (Soteriology)

### The Assurance of Faith

The devil always tries to make believers in Christ doubt their salvation. In the Garden of Eden the devil tried to get Eve to doubt the goodness of God. He suggested that God was trying to keep something good away from Eve by His command that she and Adam should not eat the fruit of the forbidden tree (Genesis 3). So also the devil does all he can to create doubt and uncertainty in the hearts of Christians today. God, on the other hand, wants to make sinners confident of their salvation through Christ. He assures us that His desire is for all to be saved, and that Jesus died for all, and that there is no sin too horrible to be forgiven through Christ's redemption. **"God...desires all men to be saved... Christ Jesus...gave Himself a ransom for all"** (1 Timothy 2:3-6). **"Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more"** (Romans 5:20).

It is possible, however, to have the wrong kind of assurance. We may put our trust in ourselves – in our own faith and love – and talk ourselves into believing that our faith is so strong that we could never fall away. To such a person Paul says: **"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall"** (1 Corinthians 10:12). Peter walked into this trap when he told Jesus on the night Jesus was arrested that even if all the other disciples fell away, he, Peter, would not fall away. But when the others fled, Peter fled also, and later that night he said that he did not even know who Jesus was (Mark 14:29-31, 66-72). The apostle Paul himself considered his own weakness, and said: **"I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified"** (1 Corinthians 9:27).

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul considered the question of why so many Jewish people rejected their own Messiah, whereas so many Gentiles were being brought to faith. Even though they had been brought to faith, Paul warned the Gentile Christians: **"Because of unbelief they (the Jews) were broken off, and you (Gentiles) stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear, For if God did not spare the natural branches (the Jews), He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again"** (Romans 11:20-23).

False assurance in oneself or in something other than Christ is called carnal security. It is an attitude that the Old Testament prophets rebuked frequently. For example, the people at the time of Jeremiah trusted in the fact that they worshiped God in the magnificent temple built by Solomon, and therefore they were certainly secure, even though they freely disobeyed God's commands otherwise. Therefore Jeremiah said to them: **"Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.' ... You trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations?'"** (Jeremiah 7:4-10).

When we understand faith properly, we realize that our salvation is sure because it does not depend in any way on us or on any other undependable person or thing; it depends only on God, who cannot lie and is always faithful to His promises. Faith means that we give up on ourselves and on our own efforts entirely and depend completely on Christ and on what Christ has done for us and on what God

says about what Christ has done for us. The intended result of such faith is peace with God, joy in God's salvation, and the sure hope of eternal life. **"Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"** (Romans 5:1). **"Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed"** (Romans 4:16).

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to give us faith in Christ and to strengthen our faith in Christ through the words and promises of our God. Jesus said to His disciples: **"When the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me"** (John 15:26). Again: **"When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth... He will glorify Me"** (John 16:13-14). The Holy Spirit makes us certain of our salvation because He testifies of Christ and glorifies Christ as our one and only Savior. He reminds us of what Christ has done to win for all the forgiveness of sins, and He teaches us to pin our hopes entirely on Him.

**"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God"** (Romans 8:16). He teaches us not to trust in ourselves, but in Christ. He shows us that even faith in Christ is His work in us, not our own. **"So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy"** (Romans 9:16). **"It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure"** (Philippians 2:13). **"His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by His glory and virtue"** (2 Peter 1:3). **"God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 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, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God"** (1 John 5:11-13).

Yet because of our sinful flesh, we who believe in Jesus do have doubts and uncertainties at times about our salvation and about our faith in Christ. We even have doubts about such things as whether God is telling us the truth and about whether our faith in Christ is strong enough. At such times we need to turn to Christ, and the only place we can find Christ is the Holy Spirit's book: the Holy Scriptures. We are like the man who pleaded with Jesus to heal his demon-possessed son who struggled with unbelief and doubt. He said to Jesus: **"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"** (Mark 9:24). This man went to the right person with his doubts; he went to Christ. In the same way we go to Christ when we go to His Word and listen to what He says.

The apostle Paul directs us to Jesus, who alone can give us certainty of faith, in these assuring words from his letter to the Christians in Rome: **"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded (convinced) that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Romans 8:31-39).

## Questions

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1. How does the devil try to rob us of the joy and certainty of salvation?
2. How does God make us certain of our salvation?
3. Give some examples of false assurance from the Bible.
4. What may easily happen when we put our faith in ourselves?
5. What is meant by carnal security, and why is it dangerous?
6. How can we become certain of our salvation and eternal life?
7. Who is the one who brings us to faith and keeps us in faith?
8. How does this one strengthen our faith and our assurance?
9. What should we do when we have doubts and uncertainties about our salvation?
10. What convinced the apostle Paul of God's love for him?
11. Is it right or wrong to be certain you are going to heaven? Give a reason for your answer.