LD 32; I John 3:1-14; II Peter 1:3-15; Additional Reasons for Doing Good I. Good Works Assure us of our Identity II. Dangers Concerning Assurance

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how can you tell the identity of various animals? Well, you can examine its features. If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and talks like a duck. It is likely a duck! Well then, how do you know what a Christian is? What are the marks or standards by which the identity of Christian can be weighed? Today we return to LD 32 to consider another reason that we are to do good. Last week we saw that we are to do good for the following 3 reasons: 1. As a consequence of Jesus’ work of renewal by the Holy Spirit within 2. We do good to show God that we are thankful 3. We do good to bring glory to God as He deserves. But if we take a closer look at QA 86 we find that there are 2 additional reasons for doing good. These two additional reasons for doing good are for our assurance and for the work of missions. Today we focus on our assurance. So today our theme is this: Jesus Christ produces good works within us so that we might be assured of our faith. Good works assure us of our identity in Christ.

**I. Good Works Assure us of our Identity**

In our first point, we take a closer look at assurance in the context of our salvation. As you will remember, true faith is not only a knowledge and conviction, but it is also a deep seated assurance created in my heart by the Holy Spirit. As Heb . 11: 1 starts- faith is the assurance of things hoped for. So assurance should be a normal and expected aspect of the Christian life. Our QA brings our works before us as one of the grounds for assurance. And here we need to be clear- our good works do not earn our assurance- just as they do not earn our salvation. But once again, good works are the fruit of our salvation and as such they do aid us in our assurance. We could illustrate this point like this- every true Christian will act like a Christian. You will know them by their works Just as sheep will look and act like sheep. So if you find yourself in the fold surrounded by sheep, you are likely a sheep. If you go out and graze with the sheep, if you obey the voice of the shepherd, if you produce wool- then you are a member sheep herd. In a similar way, our life is a proof to us- proving that we are God’s people. What we do is an evidence of who we are. So Jesus Christ gives us the opportunity to do good so that we might see this fruit. The Holy Spirit continues His work of sanctifying so that we might see evidence of His work within. I John 5:13- These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. So one of the reasons John wrote this book is so that God’s people would have assurance! That you might know this to be true- you are one of God’s children! God does not want us to remain in the dark- nor filled with doubt and fear! He wants us to know that we have eternal life! Historically, we can make a distinction between the external and internal proof of the Spirit’s work. The external works or marks of the Spirit’s presence are easily evidenced by others. Everyone can see that you are a Christian by what you do. These are outward and observable. As we read from Rom. 12 last week, if you are consistent in prayer, if you contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality; then you are showing the marks of a true Christian. But in addition to these external and clearly observable marks, there are also the internal evidences. These are known in the heart, will and mind of God’s people. If your love is genuine towards God and fellow man. Do we have a desire to do good- do we hunger and thirst after righteousness, do we mourn for our sins, do we seek first the kingdom of God. Have you set your mind on the things above- do you want to grow in holiness and grace? If so, then your very heart and desires align with the people of God. It is clear that the wicked unbeliever has no desire for such things. So a Christian can be known- seen- evidenced by what they do and what they desire! The actions of their hand and the pursuit of their heart. To apply this- if you see these fruit and if you have these desires, then you can rest assured that you are a child of God! The fact is, we all struggle with assurance from time to time. Am I really a child of God? And I really a Christian? What if God has not chosen me- or what if I am just deceiving myself? These or similar questions are common. However, the answer to this nagging doubt is to return to the fountain and source of our salvation! John Calvin put it like this- when I looked at the cross, then the dove of assurance fills my heart! The fact is, the wicked unbeliever does not think or worry about their salvation- and they have no desire for spiritual things. The very act of asking the question- what if I am not saved- proves that your heart is tender! The struggle against sin is not a sign that you are reprobate, but rather a sign of the Spirit’s work within you! So let me apply this doctrine in a specific case. Let’s say that there is a someone here who really struggles with assurance. They wrestle with doubt and fear. How do I know- how can I know? There are two ways to approach this person. First of all, point them back to Christ! You are not saved by the strength of your faith but rather by the strength of your Savior! Your weakness is covered by His blood- you nakedness is covered by His righteousness! So look to Him- trust that He will do what He has said! A second way to answer this person is by looking at the fruit of faith. Earlier we read from I John 3:14- we know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers. So then- do you love the brothers? Do you love God’s people? Do you love the church of Jesus Christ? Yes- well then, John says that you can know that you have passed out of death into life! Only a Christian will really love fellow Christians! So then, our works of obedience- the good fruit that we see in us- is proof of the Spirit’s presence. These words can be used to prove and assure us that we are God’s people. So a little introspect is not always bad- for we can see that the Holy Spirit is working in my life! We can see evidence of Jesus making us more like Him! I hate my sin more today than I did last year. I want to grow in holiness and obedience! So to conclude our first point, assurance is the work of the Holy Spirit by which a believer is conscious and convicted of his salvation. As a part of true faith, this deep-rooted assurance is a fruit of the Spirit’s presence and work within us. How can we have this assurance? Well, you can look for the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work within. So confidence in your salvation is found when you look at the sufficiency of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit within!

**II. Dangers Concerning Assurance**

However, confidence is not always a good thing! Sometimes people are confident in things that are not true. I was playing a board game last week, and we talked about the Mandela Effect. The Mandela Effect is where a large group of people believe that some event has happened even though it didn’t actually happen. For example, a large percentage of the US population believes Nelson Mandela died in prison in the 80’s. However, he was released from prison and died in 2013. So many people can be convinced and convicted of something that is actually wrong! People can be assured of something that is actually not true. So in our second point, we have to consider the dangers concerning assurance. Although assurance of true faith is a good and expected consequence of the Spirit’s presence and work within, there are dangers that must be guarded against. The first danger is that of hypocrisy, presumption and pride. It is possible for people to be confident in their being a true Christian without actually having the marks of a true Christian. Some people just presume that they are right with God even though they do not have true faith and they care little about spiritual things. They are happy to live in their sin- their wicked deeds and desires do not really bother them. Presumption can be a very dangerous thing- if you make assumptions that are not based in reality. Some young people might say- “Well, my grandparents and parents were Christians, so I suppose I am.” This is not a credible statement of faith! Why do you want to join the church? Because it is expected! But their hearts remain unmoved. A cold, lifeless, uncaring member of the church is not a true Christian and should not have assurance. There are also hypocrites that are full of deception. We call these wolves in sheep’s clothing. They may look like sheep on the exterior, but inside they are full of wickedness and deceit! Jesus calls these kinds of people whitewashed tombs. Clean on the outside but inside they are full of death! Here again, the outside does not match the inside. You cannot deceive God- and God is not mocked! Not only is it clear that God’s people will pursue holiness, it is also clear that the wicked unbeliever has no taste for the things above. So in order to enjoy the benefit of assurance, God’s people must also display a zeal for doing good. As we considered last week from Titus 2:14 - a zeal for every good work is a clear mark of God’s people. So don’t give up- don’t be slothful in this pursuit. We read earlier from II Peter 1- and let me remind you of the consistent calling to be dedicated- to make the effort- to put in the work. So as II Peter puts it- make every effort- be all the more diligent- I remind you to be stirred up. So effort and zeal remain a necessary aspect of true faith- and this zeal only adds to our assurance. We need to be committed to pursuing the means of assurance! And that includes a dedication- not just an outward routine but an inner desire and pursuit of what is good and pleasing to God! And when we see this dedication, we can take comfort in the fact that the Spirit has given us the will and the way! No room for pride- but comfort and even joy in that I can see His work made manifest in me. By this we can remind ourselves of who we are. Living trees have fruit. If you see good fruit in your life, you know that you have been made into a living tree! As Rom. 8:16 puts it, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

To conclude, as Kevin DeYoung summarized From the Canon of Dort, assurance does not come from external revelation, but rather assurance does come from these 3 areas. 1. Assurance comes from faith in the promises of God. 2. Assurance comes from the testimony of the Holy Spirit testifying to our spirits that we are children of God. 3. Assurance comes from “a serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience and of good works.” So, in other words, if you want to enjoy a growth in assurance, the best way to receive this gift is by trusting in God’s promises, praying for the Spirit, and pursing the life of good works! As our theme states; Jesus Christ produces good works within us so that we might be assured of our faith. Good works assure us of our identity in Christ. So we should be dedicated to doing good- committed to good works- because we know that God’s people are known for what they do. And when we see these good works, rejoice that the Spirit has enabled you to walk in His way!