

## THE CERTAINTY OF SALVATION

The certainty of salvation goes together with justification through faith. Faith is being certain. A common proverb says, "Seeing is believing." But in the Christian faith believing is there when the evidence is to the contrary. When we see sin, we talk about the forgiveness of sin. In the presence of death, we talk about the resurrection from the dead. When troubles suggest that God does not love us, we affirm that God is disciplining us in love. Mockery, ridicule, scorn, and hatred might seem to suggest that we are mistaken, but, certain of salvation in Christ, we say, "Nevertheless...!" The Letter to the Hebrews says: "Faith is being sure of the things we hope for, being convinced of the things we cannot see (Hb 11:1).

In the Gospel according to John, the word "know" is often used as an alternative to "believe."

It is important to say that faith does not justify because of qualities it has in itself, but because of Jesus Christ, the object of faith. Faith saves, not because of what faith is, but because of what faith receives. Faith is not a work that earns anything. Faith is the hand that receives God's free gift. Our certainty of salvation does not rest on looking at our own faith, but on looking to Jesus, the Saviour.

The Council of Trent anathematised certainty of salvation as presumption and pride (Session VI, canon 12). It defined faith as mere assent to what the church teaches. It ought to include knowing what the church teaches, and trust and confidence in Christ the Saviour.

Many Lutherans have some vague hope that God might be gracious to them, and that they will reach eternal life, but appear not to be certain.

One of the most common replies to the question, "Are you sure of salvation?" is: "Believers have doubts. Their doubts show that they are humble."

Doubt is not a virtue, but a vice. Doubt is the opposite of faith. Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, if you believe and do not doubt, not only will you do what I did to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and be thrown into the sea', it will be done. Whatever you ask for in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Mt 21:21-22).

When Jesus took sinking Peter's hand after he tried to walk on the water, He said, "How little you trust Me! Why did you doubt?"

The certainty of salvation goes together with the doctrine that we are saved by God's grace, without our efforts to do what God requires in the law. Paul wrote: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are justified freely by His grace, through the ransom Christ Jesus paid. God publicly displayed Him as the Atonement Cover through faith in His blood. God did this to show that He is just, even though in His patience He had left unpunished those sins that had been done in the past. He wanted to show His justice at the present time, so that He might be just and the One who justifies the person who believes in Jesus" (Rm 3:23-26).

Doubts should never be based on the idea: "I'm not good enough." Rather, God's grace is shown to all people alike. He wants all to be saved. Christ Jesus died for all people. Therefore He wants me to be saved, and Christ Jesus died for me, too.