

# THE PATHWAY TO SALVATION



THEODORE VANDERGROE

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# **The Pathway to Salvation**

**by Theodore VanderGroe**

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## ***The Damaging Misuse of a General Conviction of Sin as a False Ground for the Soul***

Beloved salvation-seeking reader! It is certain that there are twofold gifts or operations of God's Spirit: namely, general gifts and operations, which hypocrites and reprobates also enjoy, and particular or saving gifts or operations, which are solely for the elect. It is also just as certain that there are two types of conviction of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men: one which is general and one which is saving. The second is always the preparatory pathway to a sincere faith in Christ, whilst the other ordinarily leads to a deceiving delusion, or a ruinous despair. For in one of these two muddy canals the general conviction shall sooner or later terminate. Unless we rightly consider this essential distinction between these

two types of conviction (both for ourselves and in dealing with others) this cannot but be highly damaging, greatly undermine and corrupt God's work, and make many souls eternally miserable.

It is well known how often it happens among Christians, that those who live daily under the convicting light of the Gospel, from time to time receive some conviction of their sins, and of the fact that they miss the Lord Jesus and that they lie fatally bound in the bands of God's curse and wrath. Through this conviction they are troubled and made afraid or concerned for a time. They also begin with some seriousness to strive restlessly to improve their condition and way of life. But because they are moved merely by a general conviction, they do not come to a believing union with Christ, to which the saving conviction of the Holy Spirit leads the true elect. They always remain fixed in the foundation of their natural blindness and gracelessness. They are sometimes as the children which are come to the birth, but *there is* not strength to bring forth (Is. 37:3). Often the reason for this is that they take their conviction and use it, without realizing it, as a ground of hope. They imagine (and allow others to convince them, who are insufficiently experienced in the work of the Spirit) that their convictions and concern are already a beginning of the divine grace of the new birth in their hearts. They imagine that they are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, those who are poor and spirit and that mourn, who are called blessed by the Lord Jesus (Matt. 5:3-6). By this they believe that this work of God will gradually break through, and that Christ in His time, when it pleases Him, will further reveal Himself to them, and will give them the comforting assurance of His Spirit, which they as yet miss. They think that they merely have to continue in their prayers and seeking, and should in no wise, in unbelief, have doubts about the grace which they image they have received, or grieve the Holy Spirit.

In such a pathway, such misguided souls gradually lose their anxious fears and unrest and begin to draw comfort from this or that promise, which they apply to themselves on false grounds. In

due course/time, they come into such a deceived state, not only a state of composure, but are also confirmed in this state of false peace. They grow higher and higher, until they eventually, by common duties and Gospel means become great Christians in their own eyes, and in the eyes of others, without ever being able to give a good testimony of their union by faith with Christ. Rather they will apply to themselves what is written (Mark 4:26, 27): “So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.’ It is possible that in this unspiritual age many such miserable, deceived persons shall be found everywhere, who are considered good Christians, but in whose hearts nothing is found of the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus, seeing they never came to Him by the Spirit of true faith, with a sincere renouncing of themselves and of all earthly things. And how difficult it later proves to truly convince such people of their miserable soul-delusion (especially when through the passage of time this delusion is grown fixed and as a strong bulwark in their hearts), will be the sad experience of those who are called to labour earnestly for the salvation of the never-dying souls entrusted to their care. Therefore it is so necessary that poor sinners who have begun to be concerned for their eternal salvation, on that account receive good council and direction, that they might, by God’s grace, watch out for the dangerous rocks of satan, by which so many others have been fearfully lost and have suffered the shipwreck of their souls. To this end, we shall seek to explain a number of points, upon which we desire all to pay due attention, seeing the unspeakable weight of our eternal salvation hangs on the right understanding of them.

1. A naked work of conviction, in whatever form it may be, can in itself give no-one any part or share in Christ and in salvation.

All true conviction of sin is merely a preparatory legal work of the Spirit, in order to bring someone out of themselves to Christ, in order that he would receive Him as his own Saviour by a sincere

faith, resting on the promises of the Holy Gospel, and put all his trust in Him alone.

Every sinner who lives under the Gospel always has the freedom, on the basis of the universal invitation of Christ, to embrace Him personally as a free gift of grace from God's eternal love, and to take Him and to seek his salvation in Him alone. The Word of the Gospel is sent to every man who hears it proclaimed and assures him in the Name of the God of truth, Who cannot lie or deceive, that Christ with all His salvation and sufficiency is truly his, if he sincerely desires to receive Him with an upright faith, as He is freely offered and given to us - He Who is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). Nevertheless, however wide God Himself opens the way to Christ in the Gospel to everyone, and whosoever thirsts may come freely and whosoever will may take of the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17), yet not a single sinner will be truly in need of the Lord Jesus or desire to embrace Him with sincere faith as His Redeemer and Lord, completely renouncing everything, unless beforehand he has got such a vivid and spiritual sense of his calamitous and hell-deserving condition outside of Christ, that makes him sink down as one completely lost and desperate in himself. Without this he will never resolve with a perfect heart, as a cursed and powerless ungodly sinner, by pure grace to be saved by Christ, and willingly forsake all his beloved bosom sins and worldly desires, unless the weight of his sins and of the wrath and curse of God press down on his heart so heavily, that he can no longer endure it anymore. And behold, for this cause the Holy Spirit comes to convince the world of sin, in order that He by this means would prepare and open the souls of men for the Lord Jesus, to receive Him believingly in their inward parts. But the conviction itself is not faith in Christ, it is merely a preparatory grace for faith, just like breaking up and softening the earth of the field is a preparatory work to receive the seed and to cause it to grow in the earth, and as an old foundation is only dug up in order to prepare the way for the building of a new house.

If God visits someone with a severe illness, this is the means to bring him to the doctor, that he, through the blessing of heaven, might be restored again. Nevertheless, it is one thing to be ill, but quite another to have a doctor with you, to use his medicine and to be helped by him. For the latter to take place, it is necessary that the patient sends for the doctor and that he entrusts himself willingly into his care. If he refuses to do so, then he may remain ill, and even die from the illness, without obtaining any help from the doctor. It is also one thing to be convinced and to be ill in some way, through the sense of the heavy weight of one's sins and God's wrath, but quite another to have Christ as one's heavenly Physician and by grace to be helped and healed by Him. For this, it is necessary that the ill sinner sincerely and believingly receives Jesus Christ, and that he gives himself over to Him with a complete and heartfelt trust. However, what **good** would it be if such a person, merely from the sense he has of his spiritual disease, decides he has communion with Christ, and that he already possesses Him as His Physician, Who heals all his diseases (Ps. 103:3), without to this end sincerely and believingly coming to Christ with his heart? This would be a completely false conclusion, just as though a sick man said: I am sick, therefore I have a doctor who helps and heals me. Whatever conviction of sin anyone may have, such conviction on its own can never give him part in Christ, just like the reprobate in hell do not obtain any fellowship with Christ although they are powerfully convinced of their sins and their condemnation, and unceasingly cry and howl in vain, under the terrible sense of God's wrath.

1. No conviction will ever be saving, than that which through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit breaks through in the heart to a sincere believing knowledge and embracing of the Lord Jesus, as He is presented to us in the promises of the Holy Gospel.

Here lies the essential difference between a saving and a general conviction, that when both reach their end, the first always leads to

a pure work of faith, whereby the soul is united to Christ, while the other either passes away without any fruit, or leads to a deceitful work of delusion, whereby the hypocrite comforts himself with Christ and grace on false grounds. The reason for this is that saving conviction is a powerful work of the Holy Spirit, that penetrates to the depths and the root of a man's heart, whereby it is completely broken and shattered, so that it retains no more strength to strive against Christ and the free grace of God by hostile unbelief. The Spirit works so powerfully in the soul with His sharp and vital convictions and He wields the sword and the hammer of God's Word in such a way, that the soul is completely wounded and has no choice but to fall down as one defeated at the feet of Christ, and to give himself entirely over unto Him, crying out (Jer. 20:7): 'O LORD, Thou hast enticed me, and I was enticed: Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed.' In this way, the Holy Spirit works a sincere faith in the heart of man. But a general conviction never goes so deep that it reaches to the bottom and to the inward part of the soul. It only works on the conscience and the affections, which are lightly touched and moved. Here the conviction remains, without breaking through to stir up the depths of the heart, and to prepare it for the receiving of Christ and of grace by the Spirit of sincere faith. Therefore the ungodly, when they are greatly convicted of their sins and the wrath of God, can be greatly troubled by oppressive fears and sorrow, whilst within they remain standing in the root of enmity against Christ and the Gospel, and become at best merely hypocrites and shining professors, as we have explained in "*The Testimony of True and False Faith*" (vol. 1, p. 145) where we have more extensively dealt with the true saving convictions of the Holy Spirit.

1. Therefore, no-one should build their hope of salvation on the basis of a bare conviction, but only on Christ by a sincere faith. Let someone have as much conviction as he may possibly have, if he does not partake of Christ in the way of faith, then he will certainly one day end up in hell with all his convictions, for not convictions, but Christ alone saves the soul.



It is certainly true that Christ is always found by faith in the hearts of those in whom a true and complete work of spiritual conviction is found, seeing a truly convicted and prostrate soul cannot be without Him, just as little as a house can remain standing without a solid foundation. Thus far is a true conviction always a sure mark of true faith in the soul. But from whence can we know if the conviction we have is truly spiritual and saving, than only from this, if Christ with His heavenly grace is also in us, and by faith truly dwells in our hearts (Eph. 3:17)? This alone makes all conviction beneficial and saving: that it becomes the means, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to bring us completely out of ourselves, and out of all created things, and to lead us to the blessed communion of the Lord Jesus and of the Triune God, 'in Whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily' (Col. 2:9). Herein we must find the only true ground of our trust, that is in Christ in us by the Holy Spirit, Who works and strengthens sincere faith in our hearts.

Therefore, when the apostle desires that believers should examine themselves concerning their spiritual condition and the hope of their salvation, then he does not direct them to a work of conviction, in order that they might be assured of the truth of their Christianity. Rather, he directs them to the Lord Jesus Himself, and to unfeigned faith, saying: 'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?' (2 Cor. 13:5). Let no-one therefore be content if they see some work of agitation and conviction in themselves, to build a hope of salvation upon it. Rather that such would earnestly try and examine, if he finds such a conviction from the Holy Spirit within him, that has brought him to a sincere faith in Jesus Christ and has made Him also come into their hearts with His heavenly grace: a vital and powerful conviction of guilt and sin, of wrath and curse, of enmity and impotence, whereby he is inwardly completely broken and humbled before the high God, Who is so spotlessly holy that no sinner can ever stand before Him than in Christ in Whom He is well pleased (Matt. 3:17). Such were the convictions of the Publican, of Paul, of the keeper of

the prison, of the woman that was a sinner, of the Jews on the Day of Pentecost and of others, which as saving convictions of the Spirit are recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

1. Thus it must be held by us as a certain rule of Christianity that so long as someone does not know the Lord Jesus with a spiritual and believing knowledge, with personal application for himself, and of a heartfelt trust upon Him and His grace, on the basis of the promises of the Holy Gospel, he has as yet no true saving convictions with the conviction of sin and curse, of condemnation, of impotence, etc., whatever he may experience in his heart and however terrified and troubled he may be under it. The reason for this is clear with those for whom the eyes of their understanding have been enlightened and opened. For so long as one does not truly know the Lord Jesus with a believing and spiritual knowledge, he does not heartily believe in Him unto salvation. Therefore it is so necessary that such a person is firstly thoroughly convicted of their unbelief by the Holy Spirit, for their conviction to be complete and saving to bring them believing to Christ. For after all, is Christ not given to us by God to be a Saviour by mere grace, in the promises of the Holy Gospel? And may not all who are truly willing, receive Him immediately as their own Redeemer and Saviour, and place upon Him all their hope and trust alone? All those who refuse to do so in true sincerity of soul, surely remain in their unbelief toward God and His most precious Gospel, and thus make God to be a liar, for 'he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar' (1 John 5:10).

Behold, this is man's greatest sin and guilt before God. All their other sins together cannot be so heavy and condemning as this sin of unbelief, seeing it is the cause that there can be no forgiveness or deliverance from any sin. God's Spirit therefore particularly convinces those whom He savingly renews and converts in Christ of this sin of unbelief, in which by nature all mankind lies tightly bound. The Saviour Himself teaches us this, speaking of the Holy

Spirit – ‘and when He is come, He will convince the world of sin’, that is the elect and believing world, that are saved. This conviction of sin is further described, as that which occurs in this way by the Spirit to all: ‘of sin, because they believe not on Me’ (John 16:8, 9). That is to say, the Holy Spirit convinces man particularly and effectually of this great sin of unbelief, and hereby we may note and distinguish His heavenly working. And most certainly, this is the Spirit’s saving conviction, when He comes to work effectually in our hearts to convince us, not only of our sin against the law, but also of our particular sin against the Gospel. This sin against the Gospel is that we do not believe with our hearts in Christ and the veritable promises of God, that we lie entirely sunk in the lake of unbelief and enmity against God, and refuse to be saved by His own devised way of pure grace through Christ. As long as someone is not powerfully convinced by the Holy Spirit of this sin of unbelief, all his other convictions, whatever he may have, can never be enough to bring him in true soul-desolation to come by sincere faith to Christ. He is as yet not completely wounded and sick of soul, and consequently as yet not truly desirous to take his refuge solely in the heavenly Physician. Rather he always keeps on seeking his own life and salvation in the foundation of his own righteousness, and to this end with his prayers, tears and all sorts of legal work he tries to bring forth something to move the Lord to be gracious to him, because he keeps both his eyes closed in unbelief toward the divine promises of the Gospel.

This is the reason why, in our unspiritual age, there are perhaps thousands of troubled souls that however much they may be convinced of their sins against the law, yet have not the least true conviction of their sin against the Gospel or of their unbelief by nature and their enmity against Christ. Unbelief on its own is truly a far greater and more ruinous sin than all their other sins against the law put together, ‘from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses, nevertheless by Christ all that believe are justified from all things, by Whom the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to us’ (Acts 13:38, 39).

If we are already convicted of our sin against God's law, and yet have not believed in Christ by the Spirit of the Gospel, we can never receive forgiveness of one single sin or be sanctified. Therefore our unbelief is most certainly our greatest and most serious sin, as it causes us to remain in all our other sins, and holds us bound under God's curse and wrath, without the slightest hope of deliverance. So long as someone is not thoroughly convicted of this sin of unbelief, and is brought to true humiliation before the Lord, he will continue in this unrepentant state, whatever other convictions he may have. As he was born under the reigning power of the broken Covenant of Works in Adam, unbelief is truly his own nature, which is just as difficult for him to cast off and change as an Ethiopian can change his skin, or a leopard his spots (Jer. 13:23).

Indeed, the more he is convinced of his sins against the law, the more his corrupt legalistic nature will be awakened and driven on to seek his salvation in all sorts of ways, in a path of unbelief and self-righteousness: of tears, prayers and all sorts of outward religious duties etc. in which he will still seek his life outside Christ and the grace which is presented in the Gospel. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, that is by means of the knowledge, impulsion and conviction of the law upon the conscience, will work all sorts of desires in him, to wit against the whole law and particularly against that most important command of faith. This command exhorts us that we should seek our life and salvation in Christ alone, by the pure grace of God. Before that, the sinner lives in his natural state, just as though he were without the law, seeing that he lives carelessly and is unconcerned about God's law. Thus the sin which is committed without the law is as it were dead, whilst the sinner in his miserable blindness and carelessness does not see nor feel it. Sin keeps quiet in him, and he is not overly much troubled or driven with any urgency to any work of the law for his salvation.

But it is completely different when the commandment has come, and God has brought the law with its strict demand and curse before the eyes of his understanding with any clarity. When this

commandment by conviction is pressed and bound on his conscience, then sin immediately becomes alive again, it troubles and distresses the sinner, and makes him full of fear for God's wrath and sets him to the work of the law to seek his salvation there, and not to leave anything unattempted (Rom. 7:8, 9).

When such a troubled sinner then hears and reads of a Saviour in the Gospel, and of God's grace and mercy for poor broken sinners, normally he will immediately begin to work to obtain the Saviour and divine grace in his blind self-righteousness and legalistic unbelief. He believes that he sincerely desires the Lord Jesus as his Deliverer and that he desires to be delivered and saved by Him. This is because he does not see his blind and unbelieving heart, because he is as yet not convicted in any way of the sinfulness of his unbelief against the Gospel. This arises because he has not rightly considered the promises of God's free grace in the Gospel, the sure knowledge of which, worked by the Holy Spirit in the heart, is the essential foundation of true saving faith. He does not earnestly consider how God grants and offers the Lord Jesus completely freely, by pure grace as a complete Saviour for all his sins, so that if he is truly willing, he may immediately take of this water of life as a gracious free gift of God's unfathomable mercy.

He also does not consider that the Lord presents in His Word so often his sin of unbelief and of his unwillingness to come to Christ, and earnestly rebukes and threatens eternal destruction if he continues to live in that way. He does not take notice when Christ calls him: "And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life" (Joh. 5:40). He rather imagines in his blindness that he is willing enough to come, if only Christ would receive him and save him. Such are all without distinction, who have never been thoroughly convicted by the Holy Spirit of the sin of unbelief, whatever convictions they may have of other sins and of God's wrath, that they imagine that they are willing and ready to come to Christ, and to sincerely believe in Him as their Saviour, if only the Lord Jesus from His side would be willing to receive them and to be their

Saviour. Yet this they doubt, and they cannot believe it, although the whole Gospel declares it so clearly and abundantly that Christ is given to them as a Saviour by God's pure grace, and that He is willing to be their Redeemer and Saviour at this very moment, if only they will sincerely receive Him with a complete renouncement of everything and will open their hearts completely to Him.

However much the Lord Jesus, by His Word, calls in their ears that He stands and knocks at the door of their hearts with His divine convictions and with the promises of the Holy Gospel, and that, if they will hear His voice and will open the door for Him, He will come in to them immediately and sup with them and they with Him (Rev. 3:20); however often and however earnestly He exhorts them and however tenderly He calls them, they are not willing to come to Him in sincere faith with all their sins and miseries of soul. They refuse to cast themselves upon Him with complete trust, and whatever assurances, promises, exhortations and threatening He uses to win them and to persuade their unbelieving and unbending hearts, that they would sincerely believe in Him as the One Who can save them to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25), and that he that cometh unto Him, He shall in no wise cast out (Joh. 6:37), all this does not help in the least. They refuse to allow themselves to be convicted of their unwillingness and unbelief, they are unwilling to lay down the weapons of their blindness and enmity at Christ's feet. Rather, they maintain their manner of unbelief against Him, and remain standing there implacable, as those who are willing to receive Christ and to accept Him, if He only was truly willing and inclined towards them. To this end, they bring forward everything they can, in their fear and confusion (through the conviction of the law), to move Christ to show mercy to them. It is exactly this ruinous unbelief that holds these miserable souls bound in the dismal darkness of the broken Covenant of Works. It robs them of the spiritual light of precious faith, that can only arise in our hearts and shine clearly by means of the Gospel.

That glorious Gospel of the free grace of God in Christ then still remains hidden to them, seeing 'the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, (as such persons with all their general legal convictions still truly are) lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, Who is the image of God, should shine unto them' (2 Cor. 4:4). Let them now do everything in their ability from their legalistic convictions to move the Lord Jesus to show grace and mercy towards them, they remain completely separated from Him by their persistent unbelief and spiritual blindness because they do not believe in Him and His grace promised in the Gospel with all their hearts and receive Him. For what true faith could they have, as long as they are unable or unwilling to embrace Christ in His own offer in the Gospel? Is not sincere faith, which unites our souls spiritually with God in Christ and that causes us to enjoy His grace and salvation, a reception of the promises of God in the Gospel with all our hearts, which promises are not only made to others, but also to us in particular? Can anyone ever get any true fellowship in Christ and salvation, who remains standing completely blind and unbelieving towards the promises of God's grace in the Gospel, which are both offered and granted to him without price, if he is only sincerely willing to receive them? Or could anyone truly and believingly receive Jesus Christ by faith, who continues to refuse to embrace the promises of the Gospel with a believing heart, in which Christ and salvation, from heaven above, are brought forth to him, and are laid, as though by God Himself in his hands, that he would grasp them and hold them fast in the power of the Holy Spirit? After all, do not the Holy Scriptures say clearly, as a general and undisputed truth, that a man can receive nothing unless it is given him from above? (Joh. 3:27).

But how shall anyone ever receive the Lord Jesus Christ with a believing heart (Who is the most glorious gift of God far exceeding all other things) for his all-sufficient Deliverer and Saviour, as long as he through unbelief continues to refuse to receive the promises of the Gospel, by which Christ is given to him from heaven as a Saviour by God Himself? Surely, if we set aside God's faithful

promises of grace in the Gospel, and reject them by our persistent blindness and unbelief, then it is certain that the way to come believably to Christ and to embrace Him as our Saviour is so completely closed and cut off for us, as though there had never been a single word of the Gospel of God sent to us, or revealed in the world. And how can all our praying, sighing and laboring for Christ and grace help us? Surely no more than it can ever help the reprobate in hell, whatever they cry and pray in their own way for Christ and grace, because God never makes known any Gospel promises in hell, but only to those who live in this world.

It cannot be otherwise than extremely damaging and dangerous, when those who have never truly been convicted of their unbelief and enmity against Christ, nevertheless seek to draw peace for their souls from a general and incomplete legal conviction, which has never completely humbled them and made them receptive to the free grace of the Gospel. To such, and of all their own agitation and attempts to get a Christ in a way of unbelief, should rightly be said (in a spiritual sense): 'Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope: thou hast found the life of thine hand; therefore thou wast not grieved' (Is. 57:10).

What a lethal and terrible deception of the devil it is, that those who refuse to receive Christ freely from the hand of God's gracious promises, are still so greatly troubled and so ceaselessly work to hammer out an imagined Christ for their poor souls from some weak and general convictions which they find in themselves, and that they wish to lay the foundations in themselves rather than in the unfailing promises of a God of truth, Who cannot lie or deceive!

There is but one foundation for the poor believing sinners to place their Christianity and the hope of salvation upon, and no man can lay another foundation which could bear and save his soul, than the one that God Himself has laid for us in the promises of the Gospel, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11).



People may conclude that they have Christ from the convictions and feelings which they find in themselves, but they can easily be terribly deceived a multitude of times by the seduction of satan and by their own spiritual blindness. But those who sincerely and believingly draw this conclusion of this only foundation, by the working of the Spirit, only from the promises of God's grace in the Gospel, make a true and infallible conclusion in this matter, which is so certain as God Himself, Who has given Christ to us as a Saviour in the Gospel by free grace alone.

Oh, that the Lord would grant that everyone who reads this, and until now has gone along with an assumed Christ in their imaginations, might be rightly convicted this day, and that he might be moved to seek a true Saviour for his poor soul, and to sincerely and believingly turn as a completely lost and ruined sinner to the gracious promises of the Gospel of the Holy Spirit.

O, my friends! Stand still here for a moment with your hearts, if it is possible, and be rightly convicted of all your false grounds of deception. That is, with all the general anxiety, agitation and feelings in your blind unbelief, you are still completely separated and estranged from blessed communion with the Lord Jesus and still lie bound under the curse and wrath of Almighty God. By the soul transforming light of the Holy Spirit, which still shines upon you, acquaint yourself thoroughly with God's gracious promises in Christ through the Gospel (Eph. 3:6)! Behold and understand that Christ with all His sufficiency will immediately be truly yours, if you will only sincerely and believingly receive Him without price as your Christ and Saviour from the hand of God's unfailing promises. As soon as you truly open your eyes, then you will immediately see perfectly clearly how until now, by your unbelief in God's true Gospel, you have sought in vain for Christ, and thus have rested your soul for a long time on the broken reed of an imagined Christ. And behold, you will then be immediately convicted to the depths of your utterly ruined and condemned state by the Holy Spirit through the clear shining light of the Gospel. You will become most

powerfully conscious of your lack of Christ and of all saving grace, and how until now you have had nothing of the Spirit of true faith, to draw out of the deep wells of salvation, from the living water of grace, which you could receive completely without price, as soon as you become truly poor in spirit, and a hungerer and thirster after righteousness (Joh. 4:11, Matt. 5:3, 6).

You shall then immediately see clearly like the sun shines in her strength, that all your desires which you previously thought to have for the Lord Jesus were nothing but blindness and unbelief. You will see that you never desired to receive Him with a truly believing and humbled heart, solely resting upon the gracious promises of the Holy Gospel, from which promises you could receive Him from God Himself without price, if you truly desired Him. O how greatly you would then abhor your damnable and foolish unbelief! How you would be persuaded with heartbreaking shame, that the Lord Jesus is incomparably more willing to be your Saviour, than you ever could be to receive Him and accept Him! Truly, then you would immediately become very vividly aware of your fatal enmity against Christ and your unwillingness to believe in Him with all your heart, and how eternally impossible it is for a sinner to come to Christ, unless the Father, who sent Him, draw him (Joh. 6:44). You will then see that the smallest speck of sincere faith is a pure gift or work of God, which He is pleased to work in us by His Spirit, when we were completely dead in sin (Joh. 6:29, Eph. 2:8). O, then you would most certainly know and acknowledge with the deepest humiliation before the Lord: 'And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places' (Eph. 1:19, 20). Beloved friends! Then you would not wait one moment longer to completely forsake all the rotten supports of your general convictions, and all your outward duties and legalistic works, and to turn to that wondrous light of the Holy Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead of wishing to move the Lord Jesus more to be merciful to you, you would only grieve with a deep

sorrow that you can find no faith in yourself for such a most suitable and most willing Saviour!

This is the wondrous turn and change which the spiritual light of the Gospel of the glory of the blessed God (1 Tim. 1:11) alone can bring forth in our souls. This is a change which in essence is no less glorious than the first creation of the world from nothing. The smallest speck of true faith that a poor sinner may enjoy in this way of the Gospel through divine grace, is like a new life, and like a pure heavenly light in the soul, whereby all the vain shadows of his former imagined legalistic faith disappear in a moment. For this faith is not from ourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). Therefore, it shall never cease in our hearts, however much it is sometimes shaken, weakened, moved and cast around through all sorts of assaults, seeing the Holy Spirit Who has worked this faith in us, by means of the Gospel, ever remains with us for all eternity.

Oh! That the merciful Son of God would ride prosperously in His glory upon this Word of His Evangelical truth with those who will read these things in all seriousness, and that He will graciously send forth the spiritual light of this heart-convicting truth in their blind and confounded souls, to make the darkness before them as light and the crooked things straight (Is. 42:16)! That they might no longer, like the women on the resurrection day, be seeking Him Who loves their souls in the unclean and dark grave of themselves, but alone in the soul-illuminating Gospel of God's full and free grace.

For behold: The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye then, oh fellow-men! and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15).

Sincerely desirous of your salvation, I remain your truth-loving and unworthy servant in the Lord Jesus,

Theodore van der Groe

Kralingen, 20 June 1755.

A portion of text in the original edition has been omitted here, due to the fact that it makes specific reference to the prevailing situation in Rev. van der Groe's time, but has little relevance today.

Rev. van der Groe refers here to another of his Dutch works (*Toetssteen der ware en valse genade*).

The remaining text in the original edition has been omitted, due to the fact that this text makes specific reference to the prevailing situation in Rev. van der Groe's time, but has little relevance today.

## ***A Description of Sincere and Saving Faith***

My true and actual understanding of sincere and soul-saving faith does not need an extensive presentation or explanation. I confess that I do not know of any other sincere and soul-saving faith than that which our Heidelberg Catechism explicitly teaches in Lord's Day 7. However faith may be described, I do not know how to describe it better or more accurately than it is there described. Also I embrace all descriptions which agree with the Catechism, but I reject all such descriptions, which in the ground and the essence of the matter do not agree therewith. I also declare not to possess any new or better light in the doctrine of faith. Just as the Heidelberg Catechism and all our confessions or formulas, as well as the first reformers and thereby as one all our old theologians have felt and taught, so I feel and teach from this, and I will not depart a hairsbreadth from it.

In this I hold completely to the old paths and I confess that this alone is the right way. Whatever has been taught in later times or is

still taught about faith, under the pretext of further and better light or more profound knowledge etc., I keep to the plain and true historic doctrine of faith, as was generally received in our Reformed Church from God's holy Word and which has been sealed with the precious blood and persecutions of thousands of blessed martyrs.

I am convinced in my soul that our old orthodox theologians, whom the Lord has used to reform the doctrine and the church from Roman Catholicism, had a very thorough and true knowledge of saving faith. Thus, if there is a difference between the old and the new theologians, then I declare without the least scruple that I cleave wholly to the old truth, and that I by God's grace desire always to live and to die by that faith, as they sufficiently and uniformly describe and teach in their writings. If this confession of mine does not give satisfaction and some require from me a broader and more thorough description, then I will by no means refuse to do so.

I consider that sincere faith consists of two parts, that is: knowledge and trust. Over knowledge I will not digress for the sake of brevity, because there are no objections on this point. Concerning trust, which is above all the essence of faith, and is the only point of concern here, I will express my true feeling with the words of Willem Teellinck in his 'House book' as I cannot find any better words to express my feelings than these. They are as follows:

*'Concerning trust, which is the other part of faith, it is an assurance of heart, resting on the promises of God, which are revealed in the Gospel, which a Christian has, that all his sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ. This separates saving faith from all other types of faith, for the devil believes also, but he does not have confidence in the grace of God, but he trembles (Jam. 2:19). So many people believe that Christ is the Saviour, yes, and notice – some seem also to trust that He is their Saviour, but their trust is not founded on the promises of God as they are revealed in the Gospel, but merely rests on a strong imagination of their minds, which will at last fail*

*them, because it is only for a time (Luk. 8:13), and confounds them (Matt. 7:21). The true confidence arises from a particular appropriation of the promises of God unto salvation made in Christ, as they are revealed in the Gospel, such that the believing soul so considers and receives them, as though they were spoken particularly to himself, and in such a way that he more or less presses them on his heart, as though God in particular spoke to him by name and promised him this or that and thereby comforted his soul. Thus, by this particular appropriation he makes his own what God in general sets forth and promises in His Word. This appropriation is what gives us part in Christ, hereby we take hold of Christ and become so closely united to Him, that He becomes ours, and we become His (Gal. 2:20 and 16). Thus, all His merits become ours and already from this arises that trust which we here speak of, as the apostle teaches us, that we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him (Eph. 3:12).'*

Behold this assurance of heart, this appropriation of God's promises of salvation and the forgiveness of sins in Christ, this taking hold of Christ who is offered to us in the promises of the Gospel, this confidence of the soul in Christ and on the promises of God's grace, revealed to us in the holy Word, this, this is for me the only true saving faith. I know of no other faith, whereby man can be saved and obtain a part in Christ. If someone presents a faith, the essence of which is not a receiving of Christ, an application of the promises of God to themselves; an assurance of heart of the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ, a trusting, sinking, resting and leaning of heart upon Christ, and on God's own Word and gracious promises in the holy Gospel, then I declare unreservedly, that I will have nothing to do with such a faith, but that I reject it with all my heart, now and forever.

If someone wishes to ask me, as sometimes happens, whether a sincere Christian, who has true faith in their hearts, is thereby always and necessarily assured of their salvation and of God's grace

in Christ, I will answer in general terms by quoting from the book: *Souls' solitary meditations*:

*“From this foundation or this spiritual measure of grace, he always retains an assured mind and a continual confidence toward God. For from this we know that we are of the truth, and we shall assure our hearts before Him. And although our hearts condemn us according to the fleshly part, God is greater than our hearts, and He knows all things of His own work in us according to the spiritual part. And if our hearts condemn us not – which cannot be, according to the spiritual foundation in us, which is born of God – then we have confidence with a true heart – take note – in full assurance of faith continually and every moment with all our experienced shyness to approach the open throne with confidence, to plead for gracious strength and help, in submission to His will (Heb. 4:16 and 10:22).”*

Furthermore, I would like to add the short comment with capital letters (for fear that until now, for some it has gone too much over their heads) which is to be found beneath this text in that book, and which reads literally as follows: “FROM HIS MEASURE IN GRACE, A BELIEVER IS ALWAYS CONFIDENT AND ASSURED IN HIS STATE.” These are words and thoughts from another person, which people used to be willing to defend before the whole world. But concerning my own feelings about the question posed, I must answer with distinction, depending on how the question is posed and put in context.

1. If we relate the question only to the believer according to their inward spiritual gracious part, then I confess to believe that in this respect he is always assured of his salvation and of God's grace in Christ. He also has not the least doubt respecting his salvation and God's grace or can ever have such a doubt. This is because according to his inward spiritual gracious part, he always carries in his heart both God's grace and faith, or the

certain consciousness of this grace, like a hidden treasure in the field.

2. But if we apply this question to the whole person of the believer, as he consists of flesh and spirit, then I answer and confess that a true believer, in this respect, always has a certain assurance of his salvation and of God's grace in his heart in the measure or to the extent in which he possesses much or little of the Spirit of faith. A true believer without any assurance of salvation is for me nothing else but a monstrous phantasm and a pure self-contradiction. It is the same as if someone proposed a believer can be without faith. I consider that God has given a measure of faith to all His children and gives them daily, and according to this measure of faith, is also the amount of assurance. If someone has a weak or small faith, then they will also have a weak assurance and a strong and great doubt. So also the opposite: if someone has a great and strong faith, then he will have a great and strong assurance and a small, weak doubt. I do not separate assurance from faith at all, just so little as I would separate light from the sun, and warmth from the fire. I understand assurance as the most distinguished component belonging to the essence of faith, and I declare that I can understand a faith without assurance just as little as I can understand a burning fire without heat.

Furthermore, I declare that it has never come into my thoughts to propose that there can be no weak, floundering, dark and doubting Christians, but that in contrast, all true recipients of grace should be once and for all completely assured of their salvation. Those who say that I have claimed such a thing, do me the greatest injustice. For to propose such a thing, or that which is like it, would not only be in conflict with God's holy Word, but also completely in conflict with my own light and experience. I stand here free for the whole world. If there is someone who can say where or when they have heard me say such a thing directly or indirectly, or as a logical conclusion, let them come forward. Such a proposal I regard as so ungodly, false and soul-destroying, that I would not be able to hold



even the least conversation with someone who wishes to promote and to maintain them.

But the matter is this, that I propose two things that could give reason to some to hold a false suspicion of my doctrine, because their own sad blindness could well be the reason for this.

1. My true feeling is, that in this unspiritual time possibly thousands in the Christian world are found, who falsely imagine themselves without any ground that they are weak, floundering, doubting Christians, whilst they nevertheless have nothing of true, saving faith in their hearts. This brings me often to a state of painful sorrow, that people so fatally deceive themselves, and dress up their condition to enter the great eternity with an imagined faith arising from their own brains. And I bewail it most of all, that such things in this age are not noticed and taken to heart anymore, which I conceive mainly arises from ignorance concerning the true nature and character of saving faith. People have begun to place the commencement of faith and true grace in a number of general matters of conviction, concern, unbelieving sighs, desires, hungering and thirsting, as people call it; all of which men can have, and still be lost forever.

Well now, I confess that it is my true feeling and that I by God's grace will hold this personally before my eyes at every opportunity, in order to make use of it. I would have to become unfaithful to the cause of God and to my own light, if I should proceed to work in another way. That this way in this time brings me many enemies and much slander, I see clearly enough. But be that as it may, I cannot deal otherwise, for God places me there, and woe unto me, if I should walk away from there, because of any opposition.

Furthermore, I must also confess (since I have now begun to relieve my heart before the Lord and before men) that it truly is so, that I would rather desire that it happened to me according to the priest

Zachariah (Luke 1:20) than I would in the very least make sad or to bring into doubt, any sincere weak, floundering, dark Christians. I may say in truth, Blessed be the Lord, who has given me a soft and tender heart and inward compassion for the most insignificant sheep and for the weakest lamb of His Son, so that I would do it no harm, but I would rather gently caress it every day in my bosom, until it would become strong and healthy!

1. On the other hand I feel and teach also, as is readily seen from the above, that the very weakest believer nevertheless always retains some certain assurance of his salvation and of God's grace within in the depths of their heart. This he will never lose for all eternity, because the Spirit of God, who is the composer and strengthener of faith, will never leave him completely.

When I preached here at the commencement of my ministry over Lord's Day 7 of the Catechism, I have compared true faith to pure tried gold, which is unchangeable in its essence, just as all things are in their essence. In further explaining this comparison, I have stated that a truly believing Christian sometimes may only have no more than a speck or a small grain of that precious gold of faith in his heart. Nevertheless, this small grain of faith is still in essence the same faith which is described in Lord's Day 7. Whereby I have further shown and demonstrated how low and weak faith can be in a Christian due to sin, corruption, darkness, departures, conflicts etc., whilst this notwithstanding, the existence of faith still through all these things remains without any change. The coincidence or properties of greatness, smallness and such like, do not change the essence of the matter in any way. It would be easy for me to name many good witnesses, who have heard me so preach.

Now I must add here that I feel and have always felt, that the Christians of our time are mostly very weak in faith, because the Spirit of God generally, sadly, in a great measure is lacking amongst

us, because of our sins. It is thus something remarkable and rare in our time, if someone finds a truly strong and exercised believer, who has much fruit in Christ and bears it through Him. In any case, at least I meet very few. At this point I must declare that true faith sometimes, in the wise allowance of the Lord, can fall to such a depth of deadness, weakness and barrenness, and that what remains can be sometimes so deeply hidden and as it were buried under corruptions, conflicts etc. that it is hardly to be observed that there remains any faith or assurance in the Christian. It is just like a small coal or spark of fire, that lies underneath a pile of ash and is hardly to be found, however much one searches in it. Nevertheless, the element of fire is truly in the ash, and a great fire could arise from it in a short time. So in the case of the true believing Christian, there is always still a spark of faith and assured confidence, although he does not even feel it or notice it himself. God is mighty to cause that small spark in a short time, by His Spirit to so blow upon it and to add to it so much heavenly grace, that the whole heart is set on fire, and begins to burn with faith, trust and love.

When a Christian is in such a state of great weakness of faith, then I think that it is in such a state with him, that he has a thousand thoughts in him that he will be lost, in contrast to but one thought that he will be saved. Then he is greatly oppressed and pressed down in his soul with awful fears, terrors, depressions and unbelieving thoughts, conflicts and doubtings. But however great the conflict may often be for a time, it never comes to such a height that he sinks into complete and utter despair, as does happen with the ungodly and unbelieving. For by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, there remains in a true Christian always, even in the most awful and fiercest conflict, at the bottom of his heart a principle of true faith and strong assurance of salvation, which the devil and their entire sinful nature is not strong enough to ever quench. Hereby he is still upheld and preserved, and cannot ever be completely defeated. This is my true feeling of these things, of which I have never thought or spoken otherwise.

In this way I hope that I have set forth the essential matters clear for all sincere persons who love the truth. Nevertheless, I am prepared above and beyond all this to give further account of my doctrine and conviction to all who require it in a reasonable way. I am willing at all times to give such account, and that also in written form, as I have done here. For seeing it concerns the fundamental matters of our eternal salvation, I judge that one should conduct themselves therein with uprightness and honesty, without the least suspicion or hypocrisy, from which my character has a strong inward repugnance.

Persons will always find me very inclined and willing to hold a Christian conversation with every one, whosoever it may be about these divine and most weighty truths, as I have never previously declined to do. But to proceed further with a little more success, I very much desire that everyone, who has a different conviction to mine concerning true saving faith, and still desires to discuss this matter to our mutual benefit and profit, would give me in advance their true feeling concerning the essence of faith in writing as I have done here. Also, that he commits himself from his side to answer open-heartedly, either by mouth or in writing, all the objections that I will possibly introduce, while I bind myself to do so to everyone. For I cannot conceal that I am opposed to the thesis that in Lord's Day 7 of the Catechism not the existence of faith is described, but only a "faith with comfort". Putting in another way, I am opposed to the idea that the personal application and inward assurance of the forgiveness of sins in Christ should not belong to the essence of true faith. In my opinion, there are very many highly important and in surmountable objections which can be brought in, which I have until now kept to myself as far as possible, but I wish now to bring forward openly with the purpose that the friends who desire to hold to the above-mentioned thesis should open-heartedly and clearly answer me. And in order to show in advance something of the nature of the serious objections I have against the above-mentioned thesis, I wish in conclusion to give a few objections with the upright

declaration, that I would be most glad if someone would take the trouble to answer my objections in writing.

### **First objection**

If the Catechism in Lord's Day 7 describes not the existence of faith, but only a "faith with comfort", then I ask if the Catechism also proposes, that the Lord's Supper is only instituted for the strong and confirmed believers and not for the weak, because it also explicitly demands the same faith that Lord's Day 7 describes, from all those for whom the Lord has instituted His Holy Supper. See Lord's Day 30, Q. 81: *Who are to come to the table of the Lord? A. Those who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them etc.* Now we need not say, that the Catechism further supplements that the Lord's Supper is also instituted for those who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith; for there we have no disagreement. The disagreement here does not concern the degree of faith, but solely and alone the existence of faith and whether the Catechism describes that correctly or not, or even not at all.

### **Second objection**

If the Catechism in Lord's Day 7 describes not the "existence of faith" but only a "faith with comfort", then I ask if the Catechism describes the actual essence of faith at all. If it does: then please tell me where and how it does so. If not: then the Catechism is not a good instruction in the Christian doctrine at all, for which it surely has always been held; because then it does not teach the way of salvation directly and distinctly, but keeps it hidden for us. For it is the actual existence of faith which is the way of salvation and not a "faith with comfort", which should not be considered more highly than an enrichment of faith, which may be or also may not be present, whilst faith remains in its essence the same as it is. And why must this most necessary and important part remain hidden for us? Have the composers of the Catechism not known it, or have

they not been willing or not dared to say it? Or have they not considered it worthwhile to mention it with a single letter? But suppose that they could not or were not willing to tell us it, why would they lead us and the whole world so seriously astray, and convince us that they want to describe what sincere faith is, but meanwhile they only describe a degree of faith, that is, a “faith with comfort”? Or is there no distinction between a true faith and a “faith with comfort”? Or could the composers of the Catechism not see this, were they in that time not so wise, or have they with their description in Lord’s Day 7 in a “faith with comfort” implied the existence of faith? Alright, but what then is according to the Catechism precisely the existence, and what is a “faith with comfort”? Let them be direct and help us to reach a clear conclusion, for I declare honestly that I have no insight into this distinction, if at least the Catechism in Lord’s Day 7 describes the true existence of faith.

### **Third objection**

If in Lord’s Day 7 the Catechism describes not the existence of faith, but only “a faith with comfort”, then I ask further if the composers of the Catechism believed that the personal application and assurance of the forgiveness of sins in Christ do not necessarily belong to the essence of faith, but that faith can exist without this assurance. This must of necessity follow, if they truly in Lord’s Day 7 only describe to us a “faith with comfort”. But what the feeling of the composers of the Catechism was can be clearly concluded from their other writings, which we have. I shall let one of the composers speak at this point, Casper Olevianus. This man will show us clearly enough his feeling concerning the true existence of faith in his ‘Exposition of the Apostolic Confession’, p. 205, 206. There he writes the following:

Such a knowledge of God, whereby we are assured of the gracious forgiveness of sins and the image of God is restored in us, is promised to us in Jer. 31:34.

Faith is thus an undeserved gift of grace from the Holy Spirit and can, according to the covenant established with God, be described as follows: believing is knowing God by the power of the Holy Spirit, as He has revealed Himself in His Word, and acknowledging Him as true and Almighty in all His words, from which man knows His mind and will. This is to give God the glory, without placing opposite to it anything in us or in other creatures that appears to be in conflict with His Word. Furthermore in this Word as the highest purpose to behold the covenant of grace or the promises of the Gospel, namely that He adopts us through and for the sake of Christ by grace to be His children, and therefore shall not remember our sins anymore and will renew us unto eternal life (Rom. 4:16-19; Eph. 1:17, 18).

It is not without reason that the stipulation is made: from which one knows His will. Since God does not recognize a word that is foreign to His mind, so it is in vain that a faith is demanded that should rest upon such a word, or an obedience which should be subject to such a word. Examples of this are to be found in Matt. 4:6, 7; Gal. 1:6, 7; Jer. 7:3-10.

Thus faith embraces God Himself, Who offers Himself to us to be our God in the promises of the Gospel and, resting in the gracious reconciliation through the sealing work of the Spirit, it expects with certainty the renewing unto eternal life from Him, Who is the fountain of life and cannot deceive. Therefore, when someone says, 'I believe in God the Father', it is the same as if one said: 'I believe that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ gives Himself to me to be a Father, and because He is our Father through and because of His Son, so He will certainly not remember our sins anymore' (whom God declares to be a sinner, He does not embrace with a Fatherly love). So He is willing to renew us also by the Spirit of His Son to be conformed to His image' (Gal. 4:1-6, Eph. 1:7).

On p. 446 and 447 of the same book, Olevianus writes the following:

Furthermore, we see here in the first place, that the strong assurance of faith is its essential property, for it is a light that is created in the heart by the Holy Spirit, whereby in the testimony or the promises of the Gospel it not only sees God's merciful will in Christ over us forever, and that He will never be wroth with us or rebuke us, but whereby also the heart is brought to peace by the Holy Spirit, that He is our God according to the whole essence of the covenant, which was explained earlier (Is. 53 and 54:5, 8, 9).

Because these things are illustrated, proclaimed and promised with an undoubted witness by the God Who is true and faithful, who certainly fulfills what He has promised. This assurance of God's eternal lovingkindness is so closely bound to faith and a property of faith, that faith never allows this assurance to be taken away from it, leaning on the undoubted witness of the Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit, Who is the author of faith.

This assurance of faith, which is its essential property, in no way conflicts with the reality of a believer being tortured with terrors of the flesh, the world and the devil. For in whatever way the believer may be tormented, the faithfulness of God will not permit him to fall from this assurance of or this confidence in God's mercy, eternally and graciously pledged in Christ, that he has received from the testimony of the Gospel (Ps. 48:9) by the Holy Spirit, Who illuminates the understanding and brings peace to the heart.

And further on page 449:

Therefore no afflictions or pathways of temptation can delude a believer by the lie of satan, that God is in conflict and at enmity with Himself, and that there is no hope to be expected. But the certain conviction, whereby he is once endowed by the Holy Spirit, remains always certain in the inward part of the soul, that is engraved by the finger of God, that God shall never ever change His Word that He has spoken: 'I will not be wroth with thee', and that He shall never



remove His eternal lovingkindness. This is revealed by a pledged promise and the inward light of the Holy Spirit.

Subsequently Olevianus protects this Divine and eternal truth of saving faith from a type of people, who also wish to be reformed or protestant, but at the same time were infected with half-antichristian errors. One of these errors was that assurance was not an essential property of faith, but that assurance can at one moment accompany faith and at another time be absent, whilst faith remains in existence. Please take careful note, how those who take an opposite position to me, surely promote exactly the same things, and seek to maintain this, for this is the heart of the matter. And whilst these persons cling to this position, the author the Catechism calls this thesis nothing less than a fatal error, which must bring us to death, if we will continue to hold onto it. Therefore he refutes their beliefs with an exceptionally holy fervency and zeal and writes as follows on p. 451:

Furthermore, let us leave no place for this fatal error, whereby some hired promoters of the antichrist by a subtle undermining, seek to destroy the assurance of faith, by pretending to be mediators between the truth and the lie', [They seek to unite the faith of Rome, which excludes all assurance, with the Reformed or protestant faith, which declares assurance to be an essential, necessary and inseparable property of faith. Thus they want to appear as so-called mediators between the truth and the lie], dreaming that the assurance of faith, which is its essential property, with changes like a candle, can at one moment be put out and then be lit again, according to the circumstances in which it is found. Thus they place the conscience in the midst of hope and fear.

How powerfully Olevianus furthermore confutes these persons and declares assurance to be an essential property of faith, without which such faith cannot be true saving faith, we may read on p. 454 and following. He describes and demonstrates this matter so clearly from the Holy Scriptures and from the nature of the thing itself,

that it is more than sufficient to see as clear as the day, how this holy man holds this truth of the assurance of faith to be one of the fundamental parts of salvation, and holds the opposite position for a fatal error.

His brother-in-arms Zacharias Ursinus, the other author of the Catechism, does not differ from him in this matter to the slightest degree, as all can see in his 'Book of treasures' in Lord's Day 7 of the Catechism and elsewhere. Now I wish in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to make a very solemn request to those who are of an opposite opinion to us, to consider these matters carefully and to give me their true feeling concerning the authors of the Catechism, without hesitation. Have these men rightly taught us the doctrine of saving faith or not? Have they proclaimed the truth or a lie, when they taught that assurance belongs to the essence of faith? This is surely no doubtful matter, for all that teach this reject all other types of faith, which could exist without faith, whereby men can never ever obtain Christ and salvation, because there is but one saving faith, whose essential property is assurance. Either the authors of the Catechism err completely in the fundamental doctrine of faith, or those err completely, who teach a faith that exists without assurance. I let all sincere lovers of the truth judge this matter, who shy away from coming before God with a deception and a lie in their right hand.

#### **Fourth objection**

If it is held for an erring position, that assurance is an essential property of faith, and if such persons wish to propose an existence of faith, which does not of necessity include assurance; then I ask all such who are of this feeling, what they think and believe of the following:

1. Of the certain agreement of all the Reformers;
2. Of the confessions of faith of all the Protestant churches of Europe;

3. Of all our further old godly conservative theologians, who agree together, that true saving faith has assurance as its essential property?

In this respect, no-one must have any doubt or suspicion, if it is really as I have brought forward here. Studious and learned men who have carefully read the writings of the Reformers and our ancient theologians, and the Confessions of all Protestant churches, know that it is so. These things are open and clear before the eyes of all. He that wishes to deny that the faith of assurance is not truly the old faith of our Protestant church, which was generally received, confessed, taught and protected more than 100 years ago, would do the same as if he denied that the sun shines in the heavens. From more than 1000 witnesses I will merely quote one part, to show how common the faith of assurance was in our Reformed church in the past. It is known that the Reformation first broke through in East Friesland, and from there spread across the Netherlands, and that the Embder or the East Friesian church is the old mother church, from which the Dutch and many other Protestant churches in Europe have originated. I have seen an old East Friesian confession, which was published in 1528 and can be found in Ed. Meiners' 'East Friesian church history'. In vol. 1, p. 53, is written at the head of the chapter, 'The essence of our doctrine, which we the ministers of East Friesland unitedly teach, whilst we are always willing to give more instruction from the Holy Scriptures.'

In this confession from our old godly mother church (oh that we today were still her true children, and had not departed for a hair's breadth from her pure divine doctrine!) we read amongst other things in Article 26, 27:

Because faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1), that is to say of God's favour, the forgiveness of sins, justification and salvation, imputed to us in Christ and by Christ; and because the Holy Spirit witnesses with the spirits of believers, that they are the children of God (Rom. 8:16);

and again: because believers are sealed with the same Holy Spirit, as with a certain earnest of our inheritance (Eph. 1:13, 14), it follows most surely that believers cannot be assured in their consciences by any outward things or by any works that they do. They must previously be believing, that is comforted and assured of their justification and salvation in Christ. If they are not, then everything that they do is damnable for them (Rom. 14:23). How can they then be assured and comforted by it?

Furthermore, in Article 30, 31, 32 we read:

Even less does the Lord's Supper assure a Christian, that he is a believer and possesses faith. But before he goes to the Lord's Supper, he must be assured of this, otherwise he is a hypocrite and a mocker. He who does not eat and drink Christ's body and blood spiritually by faith, that is to say, he who is not refreshed with Christ and satisfied with Him for salvation, he eats and drinks the bread and the cup of the Lord, as signs of His body and blood, to his condemnation (1 Cor. 11:27, 29). If you, poor person, wish to first find assurance and comfort at the Lord's Supper, then you have no faith, that is, such a faith as is assurance itself.

Behold, this was the faith of our old mother church, thus believed the Reformers of previous centuries. They knew no other true saving faith. He who came forward with a faith without assurance was quickly rejected as a heretic after the first and second admonition. Is it not now the time to cry out with a loud voice, 'Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk *therein*.' Jer. 6:16? But if people do not want to know the old Reformed faith, then they should still tell us the way we must go, for these things cannot just be put into some corner. Then they must say what we must do with this great cloud of witnesses, the Reformers, the Confessions of faith of all churches, and the old theologians! Have they not all truly known the doctrine of faith? Have they all erred in

the essence of faith, as people claim of me and some others? Let them say it directly, that they oppose the old church. Let them openly confess that they, in common with some later theologians, now have more and better light in the doctrine of faith than the old theologians, and that they therefore wish to further reform the church in this point. For it must come to this conclusion, if they wish to deal honestly and robustly. Then the Catechism, the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Canons of Dort must of necessity be changed, and be reformed according to that new light. For if they come forward with such new wine, then the old wineskins are no good anymore, but have no more use in our church.

### **Fifth objection**

If faith can exist without the necessary and essential assurance, and if the old Reformed faith in this aspect truly errs, then I ask further what we should do with our form for the Lord's Supper that we still use, and what must happen with all the Dutch ministers who must still read it? For this form teaches us very clearly that everyone who desires to partake of the Lord's Supper should beforehand seriously examine themselves, whether he doth believe this faithful promise of God, that all his sins are forgiven him only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given him as his own, yea, so perfectly, as if he had satisfied in his own person for all his sins, and fulfilled all righteousness?

Furthermore, the form lays the great importance of this divine faith powerfully on everyone's conscience, when it continues that those who do not feel this witness in their hearts, eat and drink judgment to themselves. Let us pay close attention to these things! For the old Reformed faith lies before us as a city on a hill. But what will the friends do with this form, who hold to an opposite position with respect to this assurance of faith? For their faith, which they wish to introduce in sympathy with a number of later theologians, is here completely rejected and condemned in this form. They must hear

every time they come to the Lord's Supper with their unassured faith, that they eat and drink judgment to themselves,

Furthermore, what should we do with all our ministers who repeatedly read this form before the whole congregation in public, without being allowed to change anything, either to add or to remove? One of the two possibilities is true: either all our ministers believe sincerely what they thus read before the congregation, and they act faithfully, or they do not believe it! If they all truly believe it, then our friends with their unassured faith have the whole church against them, which speaks through the mouth of her old teachers. Then they must clearly hear from the mouths of all ministers, that their unassured faith, as they call it, is cursed of God and that they eat and drink judgment to themselves. However hard this matter is, it is not otherwise.

If actually not all ministers truly believe in their hearts what they read, then they must most fearfully sin against God in such a holy act, to go against their own conscience before the whole congregation, in the name of God to openly damn and condemn those who have no faith of assurance. When such ministers ever speak in defense of a faith without assurance, either in the pulpit or elsewhere, then their conscience must certainly condemn them for what they say. For they do not act faithfully towards God and His people with this so solemn matter of our most holy faith. It is one or the other: either they must cease to read the form for the Lord's Supper, or they must always teach and speak to condemn as false and ungodly, this form and all other types of faith which do not make assurance to be an essential element of faith.

By God's grace I can testify that if I had another conviction concerning the faith, and was in agreement with some friends, then I would not wish to read the form for the Lord's Supper anymore, as it is now expressed for all that is in the world, and even far less for the status and the salary of a minister. Under these circumstances, I would be afraid to approach the holy God of truth in His Supper.

## **Sixth objection**

In conclusion, I will add the following. In the year 1613 there was held a conference in Delft before the government between some Arminian and Reformed ministers to see if there were means to be found to bring them to unite. The orthodox Reformed church, through her deputies J. Bogardus, John Becius and Festus Hommius have on her behalf presented certain short articles to the Arminian ministers, with a request for an answer from them. If they did not receive these articles and hold to them, then – they declared – they would not be able to have ecclesiastical fellowship with them. One can find these articles in Triglandt's 'Church history'. These articles are in two columns next to each other and they are such that what is taught as the true faith is found in one column, and in the other, what we reject as a lie and heresy. I will now quote the third article as it is to be found in Triglandt.

### **Article 3, concerning saving faith**

We confess that, in our confession and catechism is taught according to Scripture:

1. That saving faith cannot exist without the knowledge of the Person and merits of Jesus Christ, and that no one can be saved, except those who receive the benefits of Christ with a true faith.
2. That assured confidence of heart, whereby each believing soul is assured that not only to others, but to him also the forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness and salvation are given by God, solely for the merits of Jesus Christ.

In contrast we reject as unscriptural and in conflict with our confession and catechism:

1. That persons can be saved by a faith which is without the knowledge of the Person and merits of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. That for a true faith, it is not required a confidence of heart, whereby the believer is assured that to him all his sins are forgiven for the sake of the satisfaction of Christ.

I believe that it is abundantly clear that the faith of assurance was the generally accepted faith of our Reformed church, in 1613. A faith without assurance and an assured confidence of heart was seen as an Arminian heresy, against the Scriptures and in conflict with our confession and catechism. For these reasons it was at that time openly rejected. If this is all so clear, then the friends who are of a contrary opinion are undoubtedly duty bound to give account of their so obvious departure from the most fundamental point of our reformed doctrine. They should explain what moves them to be so busy in building up that long-ago condemned unbiblical Arminian heresy that is in such conflict with our confession and catechism, and to so violently oppose the faithful representatives of the ancient Scriptural Reformed faith that is taught in our confession and catechism.

I shall herewith conclude, and keep a great number of what I believe to be the most important objections to a faith without assurance to myself, until it pleases the Most High God in His unfathomable wisdom and sovereign reign to permit, that in the future our times shall become so bad, that I will not be able to wait any longer to make them known. For I testify in the holy presence of the Lord that I feel completely bound, even at the expense of my eternal salvation, so long as I live, to use my mouth, hands and everything to maintain and publicly protect the faith of assurance, which was once delivered to the saints by the Holy Spirit and which, therefore, shall always have its faithful defenders until the end of the world.

This 17th century work by Jan Eswijler was the focus of a theological conflict for the truth, in which Rev. van der Groe became involved.

Van der Groe seems to be referring to Eph. 4 v. 7 here in this phrase.



For that is the logical consequence of the argument of van der Groe's opponents. In this second objection, van der Groe poses a number of questions to his opponents, to show them the consequence of their arguments. (ed.)

***A Letter from Rev. Th. Van der Groe  
Written to a Friend,***

***in which he gives advice and guidance in the way of salvation, to the conviction and convincing of a poor, lost sinner***

There is a great Teacher in heaven, who teaches as one with authority, and not as the scribes. Oh how greatly I wished to that He would by His Spirit shed abroad His hidden teaching during the reading of these my poor letters, that you may cry out in deep and holy astonishment: 'Who is a teacher like Him!'

I desired from my heart, that I could have answered your most endearing letter sooner, and for this had found some time and suitable opportunity. But concerning how it is with me now, I have written before plainly and at great length. Since that time my normal work has occupied me, so that I hope that your kindness will be towards me, to pardon as much as possible my delay in writing.

Oh! That my merciful and living Master, whom I would wish to serve and follow in all His ways, would grant me the necessary light, insight and further grace to write something suitable to your state and circumstances, to revive and lead you, and that also His mighty, compassionate hand would bless it to your soul!

For it is certainly true, as you write, that man cannot help you. Just like they cannot bring forth one single speck of dust that does not exist, so the best and the worst of men together cannot bring the smallest grain of grace into your heart, even if they strove and worked for more than a thousand years, with the normal means, strength and service of the Gospel which Christ Himself has appointed for the salvation of souls. The Lord does place the outward means in man's hand, which He is pleased to use for us, but the grace and the power to cause them to work unto salvation in our hearts, He holds alone closed and sealed in His own hand.

Oh, that this one thing might be rightly understood by us! Then all the striving with God was immediately over. Then the soul of a poor and needy sinner would be firstly made divinely receptive, by the working of the Holy Spirit to look away from themselves and from all creatures and men, and also from the best and most equipped persons, as completely empty and broken vessels. Then without further consideration, they would immediately and fully betake themselves in true faith to the blessed Fountain and Source Himself, to draw from it of the living water and from the streams which flow from Lebanon.

To express it in the shortest way; there are as a whole but three ways (a fourth is often sought for, but is never to be found): the creature, Christ and despair. The creature is always the first to be set up in our hearts like a Dagon. By nature, we all hang onto it, never to let it go unless we are in the greatest need and soul's trouble. But when this weak vessel eventually breaks in pieces, so that not a single drop of water can remain in it to quench the thirst of our souls, then Christ or Satan must necessarily win the battle, and become the master of our poor souls, which depends on which conviction or power there is, whereby the creature is broken in us.

- Those miserable ones, who by the righteous punishment and permission of God, have a conviction that arises merely from the thick darkness of the hell, as soon as their foundation in the

creature completely falls away, then sink into the deep and bottomless lake of a miserable despair, which is normally fatal. Along this precipitous pathway have passed Judas, Saul and many others, and they suddenly fell down into eternal destruction.

- But those whose conviction flows from the blessed light of heaven, flee by the faith of the Spirit immediately as poor, lost manslayers with all their hearts to the city of refuge Christ. This happens as soon as with all their trust and expectation they are once and for all driven out of themselves and from the creature to Him.

Oh, I wish that these truths, that man cannot help us, and many others of that sort, would not always remain so suspended in our darkened and unbelieving mind, but that an Almighty hand of grace would drive them deep down into the depths of our hearts. There they shall be preserved against Satan and all the gates of hell, as soon as Christ, by His Spirit, has driven and locked them out of them. For truly, these truths must come there, into the depths of our hearts, otherwise we will surely be lost forever, with all the beautiful truths in our mouths, head and heart.

Oh! Beseech the Lord then (and may you do it sincerely and believingly) for a heavenly conviction of the Holy Spirit, whereby you may, with a full and hearty convincing of your soul, truly see and believe that you lie so condemned and damned, dead and powerless in your sins before God that neither you, nor any creature in heaven or earth can help your soul in the smallest degree or can save your life. I can most certainly assure you, that Christ undoubtedly will hear such a prayer from a poor, needy sinner, and that His hand will be so laid upon thy soul, that not even 1,000 devils with all their might could hinder your blessed conversion.

You write further, that your burdens do not press upon you enough, and I can believe it. In itself it is true. This ails you, but I beseech you, that you would learn to observe seriously where this great and

sorrowful lack most particularly comes from. The Lord Jesus asked once: perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? (Mark 8:17) Oh, your hard heart, this is the greatest evil which you must be cured of by blood and by the grace of the Spirit, if you shall be able to enter the kingdom of God. And what is it that makes your heart so hard? Oh, that you might truly see it! It is your deplorable unbelief that you continue to live in up to this day. Believe, believe alone in the Lord Jesus, and reject and despise Him no longer. Then He shall immediately take the stony heart out of your flesh and will give you a heart of flesh, so that you do not have to complain in such a way, that your burdens do not weigh enough upon you.

Notice how these two sad evils always go hand in hand: 'He upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not' (Mark 16:14). You say: Oh what must I do? How must I believe? How must I begin that work? As a servant of Christ, I say unto you: 'The promise is unto you.' The Lord Jesus calls you by the voice of His faithful Word, that you, so miserable and poor, so blind and hard, so abominable, powerless and unbelieving as you are – fully and without further delay or consideration would come to Him, and that you would forever renounce yourself and all creatures and receive Him as your Almighty Deliverer, that He would draw you and convert you from darkness to light, from unbelief to faith, and from the power of Satan unto God. Then He will give you an inheritance among them which are sanctified in His Name (Acts 26:18). Oh, do not despise these precious and blessed promises of Christ any longer by your unbelief. Do not imagine that you are not yet wretched enough for Christ, not sufficiently wounded and broken in your heart, but that you must first have something else before you may come. For I assure you in His Name, and I appeal to His own most faithful Word that is in our midst, and by which He will judge the world, that you have the freedom to come believingly to Christ just as you now are, if you only sincerely expect everything from Him by grace, what you feel you miss and lack in yourselves.

Stand still here for a moment with your heart. For this is truly the greatest and most important matter, that is to be found in the whole Bible. Oh! That the Lord Jesus Himself would lay it upon your heart. There is nothing more miserable to be seen in the wide world, than that those who daily hear the Gospel so often act so incredibly foolishly and wrongly with it, to the destruction of their souls. They only half listen to the promises which Christ offers us in general, without considering the necessary requirements in those who receive the promises rightly and believingly unto salvation. They are thus miserably deceived by Satan with an imagined Christ, and they live with their attractive faith every day peacefully in the world and in sin.

On the other hand, there are those who focus more on the requirements than on Christ Himself. These stare until they are blind at the qualities, which those must have who sincerely and believingly receive Christ unto salvation. These are – such a wounded heart, such a separation from everything etc., so broken and shattered before God, so hungry and thirsty. But they do not find it thus in themselves. It is so completely different with them. What do they do then? They put the qualities, without realizing it, in the place of Christ.

Oh, if they only had them, then all was well. But where shall they find the necessary qualities, which they must have? They do not know, they look for them everywhere and pray and root around for a long time, as long as they can remain concerned, needy and active. But what happens then? Whom do they worship? A God, a Christ, whom they still do not know, and in Whom they have never truly believed with their hearts, that He is and is a Rewarder of them that seek Him (Heb. 11:1). Truly, they don't know what else to do, they know no other way; therefore they keep going in the same old way. They keep waiting if something will come, and that something special will happen to them, but how and what, they cannot express. In the meantime they are in every way very desirous and nevertheless they do not desire by faith, James 1. They turn back

and forth to every side, and they always come back home, just like we read of the unclean spirit: 'So he goes through dry places, seeking rest and finding none' (Matt. 12:43).

Oh! How tragic that is, to always pass by the true heart of the matter, and to keep on roaming and springing from one place to another. What unfathomable depths of Satan's subtlety are hidden here, as well as man's own deceitful and unbelieving heart. And once that work has gone on for some time, and there is no result, then the poor souls become tired of it, and let their hands hang down. They then sit, just like the silkworm completely trapped in their own webs and nets, so that they can hardly drive or move anymore. And what happens then? Then often the heart falls into a very horrible depression, which gradually takes over, so that such souls cannot be persuaded to do any serious work or duty, especially in secret. For then they keep saying: what good shall it do me, I have tried that so often before!

When such people gradually, secretly and gently begin to give in to some sins, which their consciences earlier were smitten for; when they begin to treasure them from within and unfeelingly give them some freedom, and when they become more and more careless, as usually happens, then one of two things happens: a) such a person returns to his first grounds of deceit, from which he appeared to have been departed. He picks up the bits and pieces of his old Christianity again, and he puts the broken watch back together as well as he can. The concerns which may remain from his previous labours, are pulled like a boat behind him. b) Otherwise, such a soul ends in a horrible and withering condition of misery. Often the enemy gets power over his soul and plagues and tortures him with hidden instillments of unbelief and denial of God. He fights and struggles against them in vain, because the evil is so deeply rooted in the depths of his heart. He does not truly come to Christ with his misery, in order to be healed by Him.

Now it appears to me, that I am not very far away from the root of your dismal condition. I have read your letter carefully and it did not leave me unmoved and without emotion. You wrote in a plain way about yourself, just as the situation is with you. I can believe it, that you are especially prone to depression and to grievous assaults of unbelief and from Satan, in more than one way. Also, that you are seldom free from those assaults, even in your duties and at work, but there always remains such a grievous and heavy veil of darkness, unbelief and conflict at the bottom of your soul. Sometimes you can shift it, but it is impossible to cast it completely out of your heart.

I behold you lying there in this state with tender compassion. It is like an overwhelming whirlpool in which you are driven back and forth, and you strive/struggle to save yourself, amidst thousands of hidden fears and terrors, not knowing where you will end up.

Oh, that the compassionate Lord Jesus would grant that I may set forth some counsel and leading, by His own light and according to His own divine Word. May it be blessed by Himself to your soul and driven deep into your inward parts like nails. Learn to believe truly the eternal, veritable and heavenly truth, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that He is given to us by God, by pure grace, as a Physician, to heal and remove all our sinful illnesses and miseries, whatever they may be. For He it is who heals all our diseases.

You express many ailments of various sorts in your letter which you are suffering from, and yet sadly you live as though you were healthy. It is a complex combination, and when you have said it all, you feel and experience much more than you can express. It that not so? Do I not write to you the pure truth, which your own heart wholly assents to, if you act seriously and carefully? 'For no-one knows what is in man, than the spirit of man that is in him.' If you should once write down everything that takes place in your heart, would it not become a huge file? But I can assure you, from the

most tender feeling of my soul, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the most precious, the most kind and the most merciful Saviour of poor needy sinners, is able and willing to truly heal all your woeful ailments purely by free grace, if only you can and will believe it, and if you will give yourself once and for all to Him, so full of misery as you are. Oh, I am writing to you the most veritable truth, in spite of Satan and your own unbelieving heart, and I hope one day, by the grace of my Faithful Saviour, to depart with confidence and with assurance of this truth to the great eternity. If this is no truth, let none speak to me about truth any more in this world. The eternal God, who cannot lie or deceive, the great and holy Lord of all, has made known this truth to you and me and to all others who read His Word so plainly and so often, more clearly than the sun has ever shone in the heavens! Therefore I plead with you, consider this great truth seriously and with attention, and let your spirit be bound to it again by the Spirit of God. What does your unbelieving heart still have to say and to argue against it? Why should you give your ear any longer to the cursed, lying and wicked suggestions and whisperings of the wicked one? For both are sworn enemies of the eternal Evangelical truth of Christ. They seek to turn God into a non-God and into a liar, which is the surest way to bring your poor soul into everlasting destruction.

Oh! Therefore do not give either of these any hearing anymore, but lay hold of the Holy Word, take it in your hands and hold it, in spite of your cunning enemies, to be the sure Word of the living God, as it truly is, and shall remain forever. Let your heart undertake this and cry to the Spirit of Christ to help you. In that Word the eternal and true God shall assure you, that apart from the sin against the Holy Spirit (for which you have been wholly preserved by His merciful grace), all, really all other sins and miseries, without any distinction, are healed by His Son, if the poor sinner will only come to Him with true faith.

What better words can I write to you, than that the merciful God, Who has good will towards men, Who has no pleasure in the death



of the sinner, not only gives you complete liberty to come unto Him, but also solemnly admonishes and commands you, yea, even pleads and implores you! Oh, what an unfathomable wonder of love and grace! Resolve then to sincerely and believingly come to His Son our Lord Jesus Christ, as wretched as you are, and to embrace Him as your Saviour; for there is yet help and healing for you under the shadow of His wings. So I beseech you then this day, and I do it with a truly affected soul and so seriously as I am able, as an unworthy ambassador for Christ: be ye reconciled to God this very day! Do not allow the great Lord Jesus to call and knock on your door in vain any longer, where He stands to wait for you with open arms of ample love and mercy. Verily, even if this insignificant letter was sent to you directly from heaven, it could not be more true than it is now. The faithful Witness of God shall vouchsafe, to make it known in His own time, and to confirm my insignificant witness with His 'Amen', for I may also say here that I know in Whom I have believed.

Why should you not by grace seek earnestly with all your heart to attain this way of faith? What concerns and difficulties can hinder you in this way? Even if you had a thousand or more, I could very easily cure and answer them all with the One compassionate and Almighty Lord Jesus Christ, and His own Word of promise that shall remain unaltered for the endless ages of eternity!

Do you feel you are not yet sufficiently wounded and broken of heart for Christ? Do your sins and the wrath of God, and your own damnable impotency and enmity not weigh heavily enough on your heart, but are you under them still so blind and unfeeling? Oh! Know and understand aright, that you from yourself cannot add the smallest grain to it. That is solely the work of Christ's free grace. He has placed it in the hands of His Spirit, to convince the world of sin.

Ah! Believe, only believe it, and come then as a stubborn and blind one to Christ, for such may also come unto Him. He calls such also to Himself. Cast yourself down before Him and acknowledge Him as

the alone mighty One in heaven and on earth who can both convict you of sin, and deliver you from sin. Are you not sadly so often tormented by Satan and your own unbelieving heart with dismal atheistic thoughts and conflicts, yes even with secret suggestions and incitements to mock with God and with everything holy? Oh, this is a very great and soul-humbling evil. If the Lord allowed it once to truly break out, it would forthwith drag your soul into eternal destruction.

But to your encouragement and comfort I can tell you, that there are thousands who have been helped and healed by Christ's pitying hands, who have lain sick of the same dismal evil, and perhaps even far worse than you. Oh, therefore do not remain unbelieving any longer, for I assure you before the Lord, from the power of my message, that there is still balm for you in Gilead. There is still a great Physician, if you will but come believingly to Him and plead His help.

I readily admit, that it is a very difficult thing to believe, when Satan and our own hearts strive and rise up to bring us to disbelieve. But this is your great happiness, that faith is a work and a pure gift of God, and that Christ Himself is pleased to work it in you by His Spirit. And most assuredly, this Hand is mightier than all the powers of hell together. May you then give it truly into His hands, to this Man of valour, who can redeem and Who has already delivered so many a person from the miserable bonds of Satan, when they seemed to be lost and to woefully perish.

Oh! What a blessed deliverance would that be for your dreary and oppressed soul, if you by the power of the Holy Spirit once truly and unwaveringly could say to Satan: oh enemy, why do you torment me, a poor miserable creature, that the Word and the worship of God and Christ are not true matters? After all, you know it better yourself. And although I sadly cannot believe it aright, nevertheless I may assure myself, that the Lord Jesus can enable me to believe it. May you, as wretched as you are, cast yourself down entirely at His

feet, and beseech Him for the spirit of faith, of which He has a residue for you, and by which He draws and converts poor sinners.

Now I request this alone from you, that you would entirely renounce the miserable creature, through whose hand you receive this letter, that if you may find something profitable in this letter for your soul, you may endeavor that the Lord alone may receive the praise and the glory. For He is a jealous God, Who has said, 'My glory will I not give to another'. This is a remarkable word, that is somewhat understood by but few. O, learn to sigh from the depth of your heart with Lodenstein: 'Creature go out of the light...'. When the creature completely falls, then the Creator stands up! O what a great change! What a treasure the poor soul wins, who may lose the creatures and may find the Lord Jesus!

May this incomparable happiness here in this life be your portion, by free grace, which is, I may trust in the Lord, the sincere prayer of my heart.

Your devoted friend and servant in the Lord Jesus,

*Theodore van der Groe*

Here, van der Groe wishes to make plain that there are two possible ways in which we can be convicted, as he goes on to describe in the following two paragraphs.

2 Cor. 5 v. 1

See Mal. 2 v. 15

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ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions February 2020 Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068