



## FAITH AND GOOD WORKS?

The theology of grace was the central point of the 16th-century religious disputes which divided Western Christendom into two main camps - Catholic and Protestant. At a more fundamental level than that of differences over the Virgin Mary, the nature of the Eucharist, Purgatory, the role of the Papacy, etc., the Protestant Reformation was a challenge to the Catholic Church's answer to the most basic question of all for the believer: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). How do I obtain the grace of God? How do I obtain forgiveness for my sins and eternal salvation?

In spite of the ecumenical movement in recent years, which has sought to overcome these centuries-old barriers in the quest for the recovery of Christian unity, these differences between Catholics and Protestants still remain unresolved to a large extent. There are many small non-Catholic communities which attack the Catholic Church for supposedly teaching a doctrine of grace and salvation contrary to that of the Bible - especially the letters of St. Paul. Every Catholic should therefore understand our Church's teaching well on something so essential, so as not to be led into confusion and error by the preaching of separated Christians who, while they are often sincere and devout people, do not understand well the teaching of the Bible which they themselves emphasize so strongly. So this will begin our three part series on understanding about Faith and Good Works!

## JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH - ST. PAUL

St Paul very often expresses his doctrine regarding grace and salvation in terms of "justification by faith," and not by "works," or "works of the law." Protestant Christians often place great emphasis on these words, but without understanding them correctly, in the light of Catholic Tradition. Let us consider some key passages from St. Paul's writings:

**Rom 3:27-28: "So what becomes of our boasts? There is no room for them. What sort of law excludes them? The sort of law that tells us what to do? On the contrary, it is the law of faith, since, as we see it, a man is justified by faith and not by doing something the law tells him to do."**

**Rom 5:1: "So far then we have seen that, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith we are judged righteous and at peace with God."**

**Gal 2:16: "We had to become believers in Christ Jesus no less than you had, and now we hold that faith in Christ rather than fidelity to the Law is what justifies us, and that no one can be justified by keeping the Law."**

This is the same doctrine as that of Our Lord Himself, who rebuked the Pharisee who boasted before God of his good works. The Lord taught that the humble publican who simply prayed for God's mercy was "justified," rather than the Pharisee (Lk 18:9-14).

What is this "justification"? To be "justified" means "being made righteous, just, holy and acceptable before God." In other words, the term "justification," in these and other similar New Testament passages, means what Catholics more commonly describe as the change from the "state of sin" to the "state of grace." Therefore the doctrine being taught by Jesus and St. Paul in the above passages is that when we are in the state of sin, and alienated from God, *nothing we can do ourselves - none of our "good deeds" or "works" - can earn or merit justification*. Receiving the grace of God and the forgiveness of our sins is never a "prize" or "reward" which we deserve because of any supposedly virtuous deeds which we have previously carried out. The reception of grace and justification is always a free and completely unmerited *gift*. The very word "grace" comes from a Greek word meaning "favor" or "gift."

What does St. Paul mean in telling us that this "justification" comes through faith, or by faith? We will answer that in Part II next week. God bless. Phillip Bellini, DRE.

It is clear that by "faith" the Apostle does not mean any kind of belief whatever: St. James teaches that even the demons have a certain kind of "faith" or belief, but it certainly does not bring them the grace of God. He says, "You believe in the one God - that is creditable enough, but the demons have the same belief, and they tremble with fear" (James 2:19). It is very clear from many Scriptural passages that the kind of faith we need for justification is a *repentant* faith (Lk 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; Rom 2:4; 1 Cor 7:9-10; etc.). Sorrow for sin and the sincere desire to change are what is missing from the "faith" which even demons and wicked people can have. This *repentant* faith which leads to justification includes *hope* in God's mercy, and is itself possible only when the sinner receives *actual grace* which enables him to turn in contrition towards God's mercy.

Finally, St. Paul's teaching regarding "justification by faith" rather than by "works" must not be taken in isolation from other Biblical passages which clearly speak of the *sacramental* aspect of justification. St. Paul certainly does not regard Baptism as one of the human "works of the law" which cannot justify us; rather it is a "work" of God Himself, which completes the process of justification for one who has never previously been baptized. St. Paul teaches that in Baptism we participate in Christ's death, that is, we receive through this sacrament the grace that Jesus won on the Cross by his death on the Cross; and this *enables* us to live the new life of his resurrection (Rom 6:3-4). Paul, on one occasion, recalled his own conversion and the role Baptism played in it: Ananias, he recalls, exhorted him shortly after he came to believe in Jesus, saying, "And now why delay? It is time you were baptized and had your sins washed away while invoking his name" (Acts 22:16). St. Peter speaks of "the baptism which saves you now, and which is not the washing off of physical dirt but a pledge made to God from a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 3:22. See also Jn 3:5; Mk 16: 16). For those who fall from grace because of grave sin after Baptism, the sacrament of Penance is necessary (Jn 20:22-23). Even though one who believes and is perfectly contrite for his or her sins receives the grace of justification in that moment, even before receiving the appropriate sacrament, this grace is only provisional, and is granted only in view of the anticipated sacrament: a sinner who had no intention of receiving that sacrament even while knowing that Christ had commanded it would clearly be lacking in either faith or repentance, and so would not be justified. Moreover, those who believe and repent, but are less than *perfectly* contrite for their sins, are not justified until the moment they receive the sacrament, which imparts the further grace which they need. (We are talking about the justification of adults here: infant baptism brings in other considerations.)

This authentic, Biblical doctrine of justification, held constantly in the Catholic Church from the most ancient times, was summed up by the Council of Trent, which gave us the authentic interpretation of St. Paul's doctrine of "justification by faith":

**But when the Apostle says that man is justified 'by faith' and 'freely' (Rom 3: 22-24), these words must be understood in that sense in which the uninterrupted consent of the Catholic Church has held and expressed them, namely, that we are therefore said to be justified by faith, because 'faith is the beginning of human salvation,' the foundation and root of all justification, 'without which it is impossible to please God' (Heb 11:6) and to come to the fellowship of his sons; and are, therefore, said to be justified gratuitously, because none of those things which precede justification, whether faith or works, merits the grace itself of justification; for, 'if it is a grace, it is not now by reason of works; otherwise (as the same Apostle says) grace is no more grace' (Rom 13.:6). (Denziger-Schönmetzer 1532.)**

### **JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS - ST. JAMES**

At first sight what we have said so far seems to be contradicted by the teaching of St. James, who says:

**Do realize, you senseless man, that faith without good deeds is useless. You surely know that Abraham our father was justified by his deed, because he offered his son Isaac on the altar? There you see it: faith and deeds were working together; his faith became perfect by what he did. This is what scripture really means when it says: 'Abraham put his faith in God, and this**

**was counted as making him justified; and that is why he was called the friend of God.' You see now that it is by doing something good, and not only by believing, that a man is justified" (James 2:20-24).**

Thus, St. Paul says justification is by faith, not by works; St. James says we are justified by works as well as by faith. Is this not a contradiction? Not if we recognize that St. James is using the word "justification" in a slightly different sense to that in which St. Paul uses it. Put very simply, Paul uses "justification" to mean to change from being "bad" in God's sight (state of sin) to being "good" (state of grace). James, however, uses the same word to mean being *kept* good - and becoming even better - in God's sight. (This ambiguity in the idea of being "made just" is paralleled in everyday language by that of being "made healthy." If we say, "Good food makes us healthy," this can mean both that good food changes us from being sick to being healthy, and also that it *keeps us* healthy, and can make us *even healthier*. So what James is teaching is that having been *initially* justified by faith, we must persevere in good works as well as in faith, in order to grow or increase in "justice" - that is, in holiness or righteousness. The example he uses of Abraham helps us to understand his point. Abraham was first justified by faith, when he came to believe God's call and promise (Gen 15:6). Afterwards, he was justified still further by the "work" - the obedient act - of being prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command (Gen 22).

Protestants often quote St. James selectively, stressing that, yes, indeed, "faith without works is dead," and maintaining that, if a person doesn't produce good works, this shows that he doesn't have the kind of faith which justifies, merely that "dead faith" which even the evil spirits have. But they still insist, in flat contradiction with verse 24, that "faith alone" is what actually justifies - that good works are merely an *effect*, and in no sense at all a *cause*, of our justification. Other Protestants adopt the exegetically quite desperate ploy of arguing that James 2:24 speaks of justification "before men," and not "before God," as if the Apostle were merely affirming that good works make us appear just and righteous in the estimation of those people who know us. The context clearly rules out this totally gratuitous hypothesis, which is motivated merely by the need to reconcile James with a mistaken interpretation of Paul. Small wonder that Luther - more radically but perhaps more consistently - dismissed James scornfully as "an epistle of straw" and tended to ignore its contradiction with his own doctrine.

There are a great many other Biblical passages that make it clear that, *after* we are freely forgiven and justified by faith and grace, we must then persevere in good works if we are to retain that grace and attain final salvation. "Faith alone" is no longer sufficient in this latter stage of our spiritual journey, for "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). St. Paul himself, shortly before he writes to the Romans about "justification by faith, apart from the works of the Law," says: "It is not listening to the Law but keeping it that will make people holy in the sight of God" (Rom 2:13). Also:

**Phil 2:12-13: "So then, my dear friends ... work for your salvation 'in fear and trembling.' It is God, for his own living purpose, who puts both the will and the action into you." (There we have the Catholic doctrine in a nutshell: good works carried out in the state of grace are necessary for our salvation and are meritorious in God's sight, because they are simultaneously his works as well as our works.)**

**Apoc 20:11-12: "Then I saw a great white throne and the One who was sitting on it. I saw the dead, both great and small, standing in front of his throne ... and other books opened which were the record of what they had done in their lives, by which the dead were judged." (See also the parable of the Last Judgement, the "sheep" and the "goats" who are judged 'according to their works' - Mt 25.)**

**Jn 14:15: "If you love me you will keep my commandments."**

**1 Jn 2:3-4: "We can be sure that we know God only by keeping his commandments. Anyone who says, 'I know him,' and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, refusing to admit the truth."**

## THE ERROR OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMERS

The Catholic and Biblical doctrine of justification set out above was generally accepted by all Christians for 1500 years. In recent centuries, however, a very serious misunderstanding of this doctrine has been the root cause of tragic divisions, and of the formation of hundreds of other small ecclesial communities and denominations outside the original Church of Jesus Christ - the Catholic Church. Some of these groups militantly attack the Catholic Church for its supposedly "unbiblical" doctrine of justification.

Instead of relying on 1500 years of Christian tradition in order to interpret correctly St. Paul's letters (which, according to the warning of his fellow-apostle Peter, are sometimes "difficult to understand" and can be dangerously misinterpreted - 2 Pt 3:16), Luther, Calvin and other Protestant Reformers relied on their own personal skills in Biblical interpretation, and fell into serious error.

The Catholic Church understands the Bible as teaching that, since the eternal salvation of a Christian depends on his perseverance in both faith and good works until the end of his life, none of us can in this life be completely sure that he will eventually reach the eternal happiness of Heaven. There is a possibility that we will fall into grave (mortal) sin, and lose our soul forever. So we must remain "calm but vigilant, because your enemy the devil is prowling round like a roaring lion, looking for someone to eat" (1 Pt 5:8). St. Paul warns against presumption: "The man who thinks he is safe must be careful that he does not fall" (1 Cor 10:12)~ and makes it clear that he himself has to make constant spiritual efforts: "for, having been an announcer myself, I should not want to be disqualified" (1 Cor 9:27). St. Paul also explicitly warns believers against "passing premature judgment" regarding their own spiritual status before God. He continues, "Leave that until the Lord comes: he will light up all that is hidden in the dark and reveal the secret intentions of men's hearts. Then will be the time for each one to have whatever praise he deserves from God" (1 Cor 4:5). Our Protestant brethren often tend to minimize or explain away such passages as these, placing selective emphasis on other passages where St. Paul shows great confidence in gaining his eternal crown of glory (e.g., 2 Tim 4:8; Rom 8:38-39). A balanced appraisal of all the relevant passages brings to light the Catholic doctrine: we should have great trust and confidence in the grace and mercy of God, who wishes us to be saved; but at the same time we must avoid the presumption of prematurely claiming an absolute certainty of our own personal salvation.

Luther and Calvin found this element of uncertainty about their own salvation difficult to live with, and they imagined that they found in St. Paul's teaching about "justification by faith apart from works" the promise of that certainty which they longed for. As we have seen, St. Paul meant only that when we are in the state of sin, our own works do not in any way cause or merit our *becoming* justified. But the Reformers thought he also meant that good works in no way contribute to our *remaining* justified, and thus attaining eternal salvation.

Most of the small groups which even in these ecumenical times remain hostile to the Catholic Church tend to follow Calvin's teaching in many respects: they hold that once we are "born again" or converted to the state of grace (justification), it is impossible for us to fall from that grace by our sins and so finally lose our salvation. They insist on the principle, "Once saved, always saved." The preachers and members of these churches describe themselves as "saved" by their "faith in Jesus as personal Savior," and tell us that they are absolutely sure they will go to Heaven when they die.

Sometimes this is because they think that any sins they may commit in the future, no matter how grave, will simply be overlooked by God because of their faith in Jesus' saving merits. In other words, they hold that, provided we maintain our confidence in Jesus as Savior, we do not lose God's grace and favor even in the act of committing a grave sin! Other evangelical Christians, realizing that this belief is blatantly unbiblical, consider themselves as *no longer capable* of committing any grave sins. Such people like to quote Matthew 7:18, where Our Lord teaches that "a sound tree cannot bear bad fruit nor a rotten tree good fruit." They infer from this that authentic Christian believers - including themselves - are simply incapable of producing the "bad fruits" of evil-doing. They forget that Jesus never gave any guarantee that every "sound tree" is always going to *remain* sound. Just as good trees can eventually go rotten and bear bad fruit, good Christians can succumb to temptation

and commit grave sins. And in doing so they fall from grace and place their souls in peril. Protestants also like to quote Jesus' words in John 5:24: "Whoever hears my word, and believes in him who sent me, has eternal life and does not come to judgment, but has passed from death to life." But the expression "eternal life" is used here, as in some other passages, to mean "the life of God within us," or in other words, the gift of sanctifying grace. God's life, in which we participate by grace, is of course eternal *in itself*; but Our Lord does not imply here that we can never possibly alienate ourselves from that divine life by our own sins. It is taken for granted here that our "not coming to judgment" (in the sense of "condemnation") is dependent on our *remaining* in the grace we have received.

A supposed guarantee of instant and permanently assured salvation can seem very attractive, and many Catholics - especially those who place the quest for spiritual "experience" ahead of the quest for doctrinal truth - have been enticed away from their own Church by this presumptuous and illusory promise, especially since the Protestant brethren who teach this false doctrine are often sincere, zealous and devout people. But in the very letter to the Galatians, which is one of the favorite Biblical books of Protestants, St. Paul contradicts their idea that once we are justified or converted we can never possibly fall away from grace and end in eternal perdition. The Apostle says that those Christians who insist on reviving the Old Testament practices of circumcision and other ancient Jewish ritual laws, as though they were still necessary for salvation, "have separated yourselves from Christ and have fallen from grace"(Gal 5:2-4). He also urges these already-converted Christians to "live according to the Spirit," and to guard against falling into sexual immorality, violence, envy, drunkenness and other grave sins. Paul warns them that "those who behave like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:19-21). The clear and natural sense of such Pauline teaching is the perennial Catholic doctrine that Christian believers can indeed fall from grace and lose their souls if they do not continue to be on their guard against the wiles of the Evil One. No wonder fifteen centuries went by without anyone interpreting St. Paul's writings in the Protestant sense.

Let us summarize the key points made in this brief study:

### **Catholic Doctrine:**

1. As sinners we receive justification (grace and forgiveness for our sins) as a free gift, because of Christ's merits, not because our own good works (or our faith) deserve or "earn" this acquisition of righteousness in any way.

2. God's revelation tells us how he wants us to acquire this free gift: a trusting, repentant faith in Jesus Christ, together with either Baptism or (for those who have fallen into mortal sin after Baptism) the sacrament of Penance.

3. Once we are in the state of grace, our good works carried out by God's grace not only become necessary in order for us to *remain* justified; they now also become truly pleasing to God, and merit a reward in Heaven (Mt 5:12; 10:41; Lk 12:21), because they share in the love and merits of Christ who now dwells in our souls by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what St. James means in saying that we are "justified by works" as well as by faith.

4. It is always possible to fall from this state of grace, by our grave (mortal) sins of commission or omission. For that reason, we cannot in this life claim any absolute certainty that we will die in the state of grace and reach Heaven. We should trust confidently in God's grace and mercy, but at the same time be aware of our sinful weakness, which can endanger our salvation, and strive to overcome it with God's help. As St. Peter tells us, "Brothers, you have been called and chosen: work all the harder to justify it. If you do all these things there is no danger that you will ever fall away" (2 Pt 1:10).

### **Protestant Errors:**

Practically all Protestants would agree with no. 1 above. However, many of them, especially those who proselytize most zealously amongst Catholics, fall into serious error by denying one or more of the following points (nos. 2, 3 and 4). Often they deny all three. The root cause of these errors is the longing to feel completely free from the fear of Hell, and to know with total certainty that we are safe - "saved" with no possibility of eternal loss. Realizing that because of our weak, sinful nature this kind of certainty is impossible if our final salvation depends in any way on *us*, the Reformers sought a doctrine which would make our final entry into Heaven completely independent of any actions, decisions, deeds, or works, of our own. Luther revealed his *a priori* attitude on one occasion: "My doctrine of salvation *must* be true," he declared, "because I ascribe all to God and nothing to man"! This was the prejudice underlying the Reformers' exegesis of the Bible; and so they read into the letters of St. Paul what they wanted to find there, failing to appreciate that, in the words of St. Augustine, God *created* us without our cooperation, but He will not *save* us without it.



## Once Saved...Always Saved?

Let's continue in the same vein as last week's column. Once we accept Christ as Our Lord and Savior some say that our salvation cannot be lost. This is unbiblical. St. Matthew Gospel states, "He who endures to the end will be saved." (Matt 24:13)

Perseverance to the end is required for our salvation. We must continue to love God and our neighbor throughout our earthly life. Our love must be an active love which requires that we "do" something to show our love. Just as a husband wife must show their love for one another, we must show our love for God in ways of service.

Throughout the Bible God has always required something from his people to show their love and obedience. Our Lord Jesus opened the gates for us but we must still walk through them.

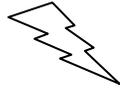
St. Paul agrees. In 1 Corinthians 10:12 he writes, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."

If your salvation is guaranteed upon "accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior," why would St. Paul write such a warning to those in Corinth? This is because our salvation is not guaranteed. We must be diligent and work out our salvation lest we fall. God grants us grace to overcome temptations and avoid falling into sin if we remain close to Him and frequent the Holy Sacraments He gave us.

So perseverance is required to enter Heaven. If salvation is given once we're "saved" with guaranteed assurance, they why do we need to persevere to enter Heaven as the Scriptures tells us. In 2 Timothy 2:12 St. Paul tells us again, "if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;"

We must run the race to the finish line. There is no winning by default or forfeit. We must "work out our salvation in fear and trembling." Our Blessed Lord says in Luke 9:23 that in order to follow Him, a person must deny himself and take up his cross **daily**. This does not agree with the idea of "once saved, always saved" or the "health and wealth" gospel being proclaimed by many today.

More about faith and good works coming next week. God bless you and make a special effort to practice the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy not only this coming Lent but always. Phillip Bellini, DRE.



## Faith and Works

Let's tackle the idea that Faith is all that is needed for salvation and that works are of no avail. Some say that Catholic "works" come from man-made traditions.

Catholics believe we are saved by grace. Nothing we do can merit this gift of grace which is initially manifested in us by our faith in God. However, it's what we do with the gift of faith that is important. It must be a lived faith that is not only professed, but preached by our actions. As St. Francis once said, "Preach Christ, and if you must, use words." Our faith must mirror our love for God in our actions and works. We live in God's works which He has prepared in advance for us to do.

Works are required for an active faith in Jesus Christ. The term "faith alone" used by many non-Catholics is not a biblical teaching. This is the only verse in the whole Bible that contains the words "faith" and "alone" in the same sentence. It reflects the total opposite. Our faith must be active and fruitful. Listen to what St. James has to say in his epistle in 2:24-26. "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead."

God's grace gives us both our faith and the ability to work out our Christian vocation.

Are Catholic "works" part of man-made tradition? We need to take a look back all the way to St. Paul. In his letter to the Philippians he says, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The Philippians were bound to obey Paul's message by working out their salvation in fear and trembling. Why should we do any different? Our conduct is critical to how God will judge us. This should stir a holy fear within each of us to strive to do the will of the Father in all things. Neither Paul nor any of the other New Testament writers portray a fearless assurance of salvation that many of today's preachers falsely promote.

Finally we have Romans 2:5-8. Paul's strong warning in this verse indicates a harsh judgment for God for those that don't persevere in good works. Those who are selfish and wicked will be paid for their actions. Our salvation can't be lost if we don't do the will of the Father. Yet a faith working in love for God and neighbor and persevering to the end is what is required of us. What we do during this life has eternal consequences.

I would be remiss in not mentioning the words of Our Blessed Lord Himself in Matthew 25:31-46.

***"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand but the goats at his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, 'Come, O***

***blesSED of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and cloth you?... And the King will answer them, 'Amen, Amen I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'***

***Then he will say to those on his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink...Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick on in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life.'***

Meditate on these verses. Notice both those on his right and left call Him "Lord." Could we not say that both are believer's and have faith. Yet notice that Our Blessed Lord is condemning to eternal punishment those who do practice doing good works!! Faith is therefore required for justification but doing good works continues and completes that justification. Therefore the Apostles, who learned at the feet of Our Lord, had it right, **Faith AND good works** are required for salvation. **To summarize Catholic Doctrine:**

**1) As sinners we receive justification (grace and forgiveness of our sins) as a free gift, because of Christ's merits, not because of our own good works (or our faith) deserve or "earn" this acquisition of righteousness in any way.**

**2) God's revelation tells us how He wants us to acquire this free gift, a trusting, repentant Faith in Jesus Christ together with either Baptism or (for those who have fallen into mortal sin after Baptism) the Sacrament of Penance.**

**3) Once we are in the state of grace, our good works carried out by God's grace not only become necessary in order for us to remain justified; they now also become truly pleasing to God, and merit a reward in Heaven (Mt 5:12; 10:41; Lk 12:21), because they share in the love and merits of Christ who now dwells in our souls by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what St. James means in saying that we are "justified by works" as well as by faith.**

**4) It is always possible to fall from this state of grace, by our grave (mortal) sins of commission or omission. For that reason, we cannot in this life claim any absolute certainty that we will die in the state of grace and reach Heaven. We should trust confidently in God's grace and mercy, but at the same time be aware of our sinful weakness, which can endanger our salvation, and strive to overcome it with God's help. As St. Peter tells us, "Brothers, you have been called and chosen: work all the harder to justify it. If you do all these things there is no danger that you will ever fall away" (2 Pt 1:10).**

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