

Election: Sense and Certainty

Chapter One/Lesson 10

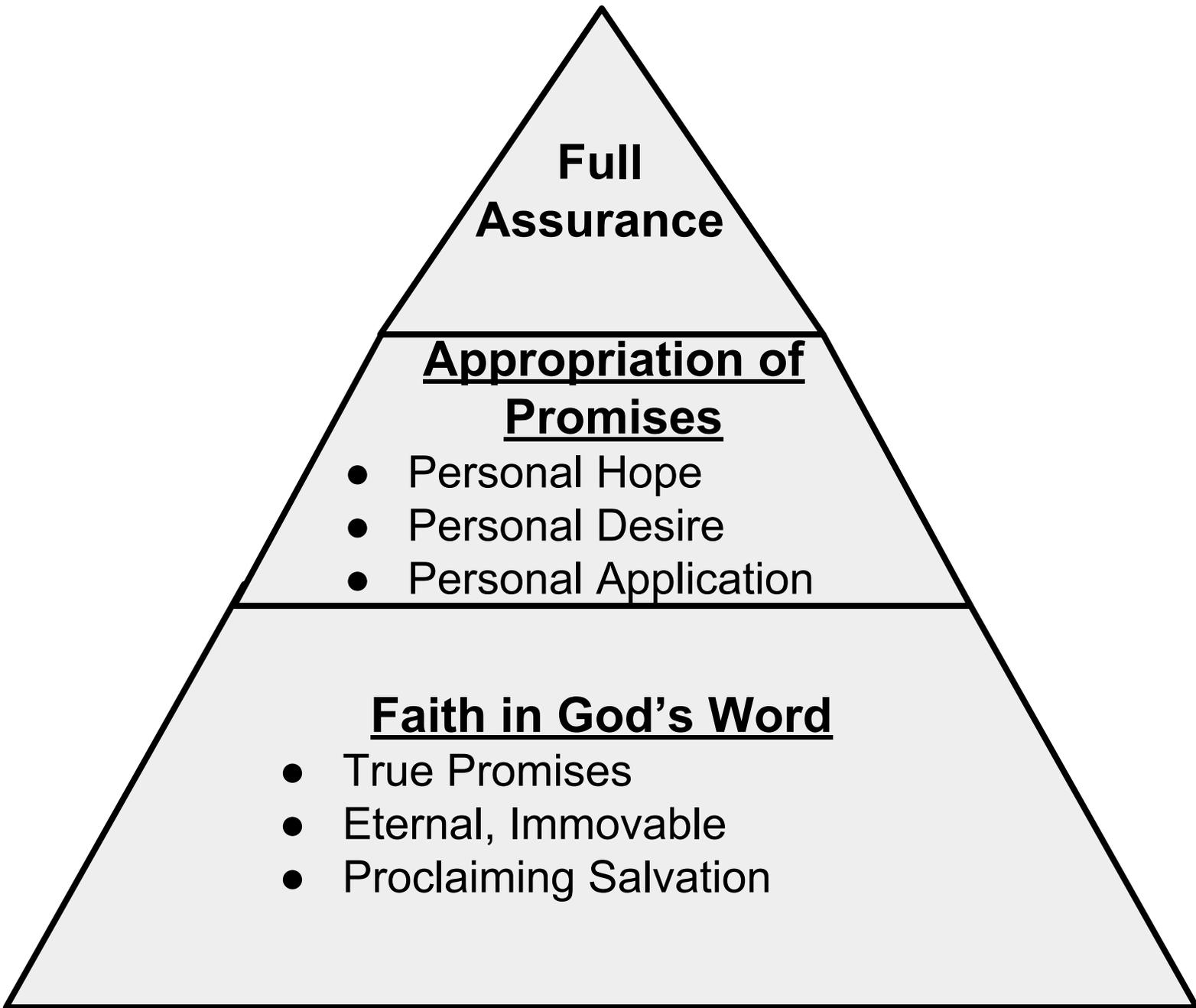
Head One: Article 13

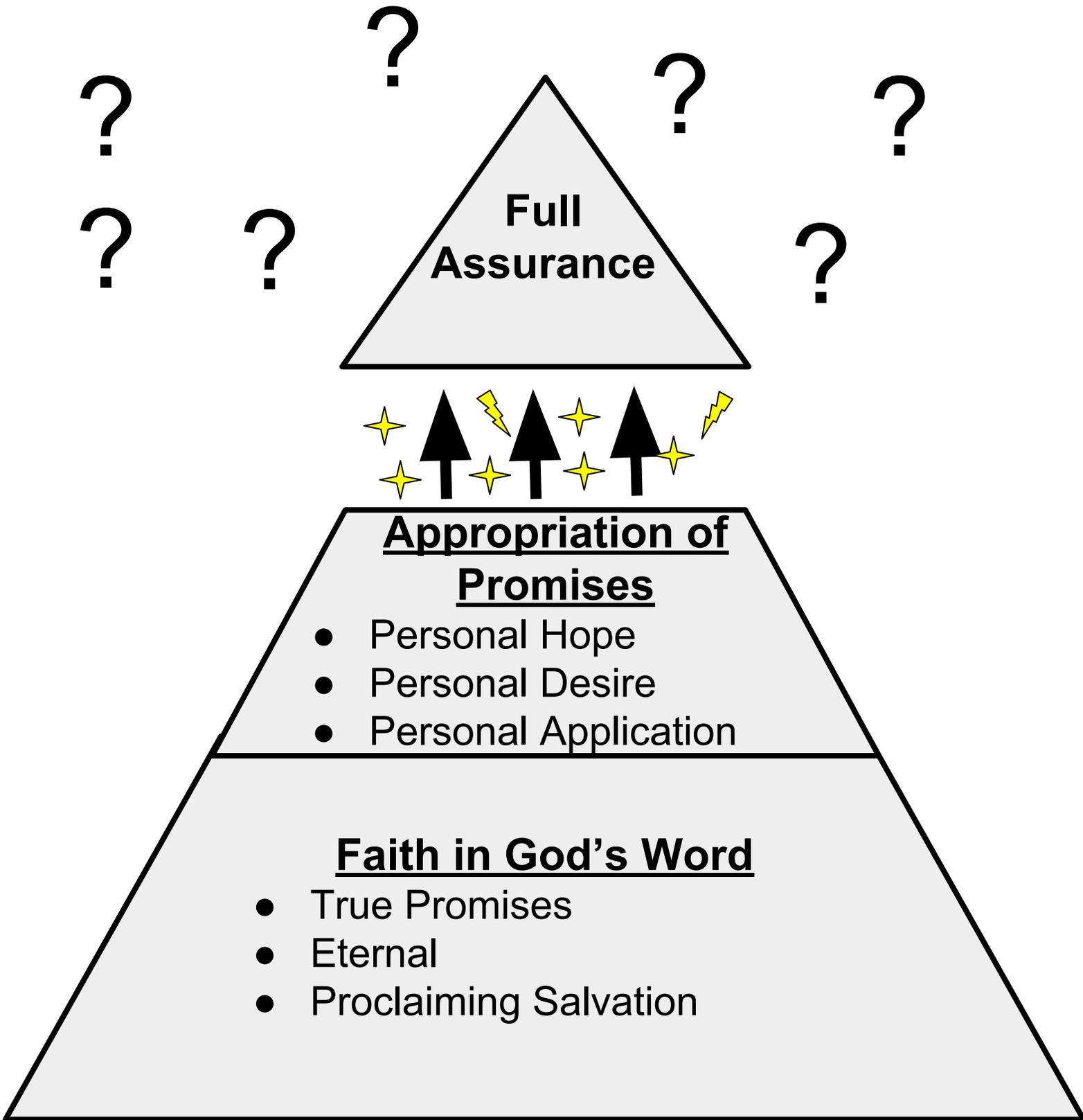
Election: Sense and Certainty

Article 13. *The sense and certainty of this election afford to the children of God additional matter for daily humiliation before him, for adoring the depth of his mercies, for cleansing themselves, and rendering grateful returns of ardent love to him, who first manifested so great love towards them. The consideration of this doctrine of election is so far from encouraging remissness in the observance of the divine commands, or from sinking men in carnal security, that these, in the just judgment of God, are the usual effects of rash presumption, or of idle and wanton trifling with the grace of election, in those who refuse to walk in the ways of the elect.*

When election is spoken of as a certainty in this Article, it is speaking of it on the part of the believer. Remember Article 12 is touching the subject of assurance. So this article is clarifying it. The **sense and certainty** of election is for the believer's comfort, that's the message. This is a great desire for many but only enjoyed by a few. That is not God's desire, for we read in Hebrews 10:22, "*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience*". We remember the pyramid from our last lesson, how experience is the capstone, not the foundation of election. The first foundation is the Word of God, then the promises believed, followed by a sense of adoption.

When it comes to assurance, we may look at another pyramid to help us understand it.





This way of thinking is contrary to the Canons, which teach us that all the elect ought to find the “sense and certainty of this election”. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* sides with the Canons when it says that those who, “*truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.*” Sense and certainty of election is not only desirable, but attainable, and ought to be striven for by every believer.

Again Hebrews 10:22, “*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience*”. For many of us, this directive given here by the Holy Spirit, belongs to a spiritual *Illuminati*. The proof of this is easily discovered when the child of God reads it, and passes over it, consciously or unconsciously thinking, “This passage is wonderful, and belongs to some, but not to me.”

Now, let us begin looking at Article 13 with our focus on what it says this *sense and certainty* produces.

“The youngest believer is entitled to full assurance.” H. Bonar



The Positive Fruit of Election

Notes

“The sense and certainty of this election afford to the children of God additional matter for daily humiliation before him, for adoring the depth of his mercies, for cleansing themselves, and rendering grateful returns of ardent love to him, who first manifested so great love towards them.”

This is how we ought to think about the doctrine of election. Election is pride crushing. The Canons tell us as much by saying it produces "daily humiliation". Nothing but humility. It is not that you believe because you were smarter than everyone else, or tried harder than everyone else, or were wiser than everyone else. It is simply that you were chosen by God from the dustbin of humanity. Spurgeon called this doctrine the most stripping doctrine in all the Bible. He said, "I know nothing, nothing again that is more humbling than this doctrine of election." He went on to say, "I have sometimes fallen prostrate before it when endeavoring to understand it, but when I came near it and the one thought possessed me, God has chosen me from the beginning unto salvation, I was staggered by that mighty thought and from the dizzy elevation down came my soul, prostrate and broken, saying, Lord, I am nothing, I am less than nothing, why me, why me?" So *humility* is one grand effect of election by *“adoring the depth of his mercies, for cleansing themselves, and rendering grateful returns of ardent love to him, who first manifested so great love towards them.”*

The Negative Fruit of Presumption

“The consideration of this doctrine of election is so far from encouraging remissness in the observance of the divine commands, or from sinking men in carnal security, that these, in the just judgment of God, are the usual effects of rash presumption, or of idle and wanton trifling with the grace of election, in those who refuse to walk in the ways of the elect.”

Notice what is produced by a misapplication of this doctrine:

1. Remissness in the divine commands (Lawless)
2. Producing carnal security (Human strength)

It goes on to say that these are usually the effects of 3 things:

1. Rash presumption (Pride)
2. Trifling with the grace of election (Minimize)
3. Refusing to walk in the way of the elect (Sinful rebellion)

What our Canons explain is there can be a notional or intellectual understanding of election which produces bad fruit. It is a heady, academic, or purely theological understanding that does not reach the will or emotions. It's what the Westminster Confession calls, *“bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope”*. This is a very real result produced in some who see the doctrine of election in the Word of God, but knowing nothing of its power.

Questions for Further Study

Notes

1. What are some common reasons people doubt their election?

2. Is there a danger in trying to give someone assurance?

3. Does the Word of God, in recounting the stories of sinners made saints, teach that some or many struggled with assurance? If you have examples, give them.

4. Is it a mark of a child of God that they have no assurance?

Meditation

The sense and certainty of election is not an easy thing to acquire. Many of the Lord's people have struggled with this for many years, sometimes a lifetime. Why is this?

I want to give you a few reasons that I think many of us struggle with what is supposed to be "*enlivening and comforting*", for His people" (Article 14). These reasons are not the usual, but unique to our circumstances.

Some struggle because they have sat under a discriminating ministry which focused *almost exclusively*, on the work of the law and sin. It is true, that the preaching of the law, and that we as sinners are justly condemned by it, must be clearly opened. Yet when preaching overemphasizes the law, to the neglect of mercy, the hearer will *not understand grace*. This produces the sad effect of total discouragement and confusion. Repentance, faith, and the free offer of Christ to sinful hearts must never be left out of the preaching ministry.

Others struggle because they *are not able to accept forgiveness*. Yes, in fact, this is quite common. Tyrannized by their emotions, they believe that, "*others He can save, but me He can not save. I am too great a sinner.*" These souls conclude that their sin is so great that it places them completely outside the reach of grace. For others, they do not *feel* the forgiveness they desire, and because they do not feel it, they conclude that they are not elect. Here, feelings become "almighty", and God's revealed Word secondary. If it is not felt, then it can't be true, not knowing that feeling can be greatly deceived.

This brings us to another similar reason; *the conscience*.

We place a wrong emphasis on the conscience when it comes to election. The conscience was never meant to give you a sense of election or forgiveness. In fact, your conscience knows nothing at all about forgiveness, and in reality, always speaks against it. The only thing your conscience knows anything about is sin. The Bible speaks about a *guilty conscience* (John 8:9), a *clear conscience* (Act 23:1; Romans 13:5), a *conscience void of offence* (Act 24:16), an *accusing conscience* (Rom 2:15), a *truthful conscience* (Romans 9:1), a *weak and defiled conscience* (1 Cor. 8:7,10), a *pure conscience* (1 Tim. 3:9), and a *seared conscience* (1 Tim. 4:12). But it never was the function of the conscience to justify you, or give you the sense and certainty of election. No, its purpose is always in relationship to the law. Its job is to either accuse you or return to silence (a conscience void of offence). In this way John says that even when “*our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts*” (1 John 3:20). Romans 8:16 says it is “*the Spirit that witnesseth with our spirit*” (not conscience) that we are the sons of God.

There is much more that could be said at another time, but let this suffice: the Word, its promises, and the inward witness of the Spirit are what is needed to know if you are elect.

Dear one, what objections remain in you from venturing on an honest question:

*'Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;
Do I love the Lord, or no?
Am I His, or am I not?*

Yet let us not stop there with Newton. Let us listen to his last stanza, and ask for hearts to agree with it:

*Let me love Thee more and more,
If I love at all, I pray;
If I have not loved before,
Help me to begin today.*

