

Q & A

Week 4: June 24, 2020

Q Please explain the Bible's teaching on Assurance of Salvation

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 18: Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation

- 18.1 The possibility of assurance

1. Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favor of God, and estate of salvation (which hope of theirs shall perish): yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavoring 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.

- False assurance is possible

- Micah 3:11—"Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the Lord and say, 'Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us.'" (ESV; all Scripture quotations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.)
- Deuteronomy 29:18-19—"Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike."
- Matthew 7:22-23—"On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

- True Assurance Is Possible (The possibility of false assurance does not negate the possibility of true, certain assurance.)

- 1 John 5:13—"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life."
- 1 John 2:3—"And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments."
- 1 John 3—
 - v. 14—"We know that we have passed out of death into life, *because we love the brothers*. Whoever does not love abides in death."
 - vv. 18-19—"Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. *By this we shall know* that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him."
 - v. 24—"Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us."
 - Romans 5:1-5—"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and *we rejoice in hope of the glory of God*. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and *hope does not put us to shame*, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

- 18.2 The nature of assurance

2. This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God, which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.

- Assurance of salvation is not a merely probable guess
 - Hebrews 6:11, 19a—“And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end. . . . We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.”
- Assurance of salvation is a certain conviction founded on
 - God’s promises
 - Hebrews 6:17-18—“So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.”
 - Inward evidence of grace
 - 2 Peter 1:5-11—“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”
 - 1 John 2:3—“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.”
 - 1 John 3:14—“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.”
 - The Spirit’s inward testimony
 - Romans 8:15-16—“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”
 - 2 Corinthians 1:21-22—“And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

- 18.3 Infallible assurance is not of the essence of faith

3. This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it: yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto. And therefore it is the duty of everyone to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance; so far is it from inclining men to looseness.

- True believers may not have it. (There is a difference between trusting in Christ and being assured that you’re saved—assurance is not the same thing as faith.)
 - 1 John 5:13—“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.”
- But they may get it without extraordinary revelation.
 - Hebrews 6:11-12—“And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”
- Therefore, all should seek it.
 - 2 Peter 1:10—“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.”
- True assurance leads to good moral fruit, not moral laxity
 - 2 Corinthians 7:1—“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”

- 18.4 Our level of assurance may vary through the Christian life

4. True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light: yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart, and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived; and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair.

- Because of sin or temptation or hard providence
 - Psalm 77:7-10—"Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" Selah Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High."
 - Luke 22:31-32—"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."
- Yet true faith remains, out of which assurance can be revived
 - Psalm 51:8, 12—"Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. . . . Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit."
 - Micah 7:7-9—"But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication."

*A debtor to mercy alone,
of covenant mercy I sing;
nor fear, with your righteousness on,
my person and off'ring to bring.
The terrors of law and of God
with me can have nothing to do;
my Savior's obedience and blood
hide all my transgressions from view.*

*The work which his goodness began,
the arm of his strength will complete;
his promise is yea and amen,
and never was forfeited yet.
Things future, nor things that are now,
nor all things below or above,
can make him his purpose forgo,
or sever my soul from his love.*

*My name from the palms of his hands
eternity will not erase;
impressed on his heart it remains,
in marks of indelible grace.
Yes, I to the end shall endure,
as sure as the earnest is giv'n;
more happy, but not more secure,
the glorified spirits in heav'n.*

- "A Debtor to Mercy Alone" (Augustus M. Toplady, TPH #434)