

THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH
XVIII. OF THE ASSURANCE OF GRACE &
SALVATION

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

Pastor Rick Phillips

I. WE MAY HAVE ASSURANCE

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 their 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.

I. WE MAY HAVE ASSURANCE

- **The False Assurance of Hypocrites**
 - By hypocrites, the divines mean those who profess faith but do not live according to the faith.
 - Other unregenerate people entertain false and worldly ideas of salvation
 - The bigger problem than a lack of assurance among believers is the false assurance of the unregenerate.
- **Biblical Treatment of False Hopes of Salvation**
 - “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” (Mic. 3:11).
 - “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 7:21).
 - “Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched” (Mt. 13:5-6).

I. WE MAY HAVE ASSURANCE

- **Godly Believers May (and should) Have Assurance**

- God intends his people to have assurance of salvation

“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 Jn. 5:13).

- Who should have assurance?

- “Such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity”

- Who endeavor “to walk in all good conscience before him.”

“A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. . . . You will recognize them by their fruits” (Mt. 7:18-20).

“There exists a clear association in Scripture between faith and obedience on the one hand and a certainty of God’s grace toward us in Christ on the other.” (Van Dixhoorn).

- **First John’s Three “Tests of True Faith”**

- The Doctrinal Test:

“No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also” (1 Jn. 2:23).

- The Ethical Test:

“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 Jn. 2:3).

- The Social Test:

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers” (1 Jn. 3:14).

II. AN INFALLIBLE ASSURANCE

This certainty is not a bare conjunctural and probably 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.

II. AN INFALLIBLE ASSURANCE

- **True assurance is based not on conjecture but on the certainty of God's promises.**

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (Jn. 3:36).

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (Jn. 10:27-28).

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

- **The Certainty bound up in God's covenant:**

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. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul (Heb. 6:17-19).

II. AN INFALLIBLE ASSURANCE

- **Our Faith is confirmed by “the inward evidences” of God’s grace.**

“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” (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

- **The Inward testimony of the Spirit of Adoption.**

“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, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:15-17).

“The Holy Spirit is the first installment of the benefits of Christ’s redemption, and therefore the pledge and earnest of the completion of that redemption in due time.” (A.A. Hodge).

- The Spirit is “the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.”

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:13-14).

III. ASSURANCE CAN BE DIFFICULT

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.

III. ASSURANCE CAN BE DIFFICULT

- **Assurance is not “of the essence of faith.”**
 - Therefore, true believers may lack assurance of salvation (1 Jn. 5:13).
- **But Christians should earnestly desire and seek assurance.**
 - Our duty to give all diligence to making our “calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10).

“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12).

“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” (Heb. 6:11-12).
- **The great benefits of assurance of salvation:**
 - *Our heart enlarged in peace and joy*

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).
 - *Our love and thankfulness to God*

“I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure” (Ps. 16:8-9).
 - *For strength and cheerfulness in obedience*

“I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!” (Ps. 119:32).
 - Does not lead to “looseness”!

IV. ASSURANCE MAY BE SHAKEN

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.

IV. ASSURANCE MAY BE SHAKEN

- **Sin will attack assurance.**
 - Wounds the conscience

“For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer” (Ps. 32:4).
 - Grieves the Holy Spirit

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30).
- **Sloth will dampen assurance.**
- **God may withdraw his light for a redemptive purpose**

“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?” (Ps. 77:7-8)
- **But a true believer will never fall utterly into despair.**
 - Therefore, both to gain assurance and to continue without assurance, we must persevere in faith.