

The Desire for Assurance: How do I get it?

1. Introduction

a. Assurance is possible and commendable

If anyone says that a man who is born again and justified is bound *ex fide* to believe that he is certainly in the number of the predestined, let him be anathema (Trent 6th Session Canon 15)

If anyone says that he will for certain, with an absolute and infallible certainty, have that great gift of perseverance even to the end, unless he shall have learned this by a special revelation, let him be anathema (Trent Sixth Session Canon 16).

The greater our sins, the more we must do to make up for them ...whether we have done enough to atone for them we cannot know until after death ... We can never be sure of success ... assurance of salvation, and the feeling of safety engendered by it is dangerous for anybody and would not be desirable even if possible (Gregory the Great - 7th C Pope)

WCF 18.1 ...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 a state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God—which hope shall never make them ashamed.

WCF 18.2 This certainty is not a bare and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, grounded 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 pledge of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption.

WCF 18.3 ...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.

Larger Catechism Question 80: Such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavor to walk in all good conscience before him, may, without extraordinary revelation, by faith grounded upon the truth of God's promises, and by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made, and bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God, be infallibly assured that they are in the estate of grace, and shall persevere therein unto salvation.

b. Biblical

i. Claims

Romans 8:15-16 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. ¹⁶ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.

ii. Examples

Romans 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: **2 Timothy 1:12** for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

iii. Duty

2 Peter 1:10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

iv. Desire

Hebrews 6:11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

1 John 5:13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

v. Foundation

WCF 18.3 ...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.

2. God's Worth: The Character of God

3. God's Word: The Word of God

a. The plan of God

b. The promises of God

A real conviction of the truth of the promises inspires trust, and trust confidence, and these, in turn are the sure foundation of a living hope (L Berkhof, Assurance, 51)

Archibald Alexander in his Thoughts of Religious Experience quotes the narrative of a certain R_C_ who said: "I had spent much time in reading accounts of Christian experience, and those which lay down the marks and evidence of true religion, such as Owen on spiritual mindedness, Edwards on The Affections, Guthrie's Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ, Newton's Letters...I also conversed much with old and experienced Christians as well as with those of my own age. But all these having, as it seemed to me, very little facilitated my progress, and the evils of my heart seeming rather to increase, I hastily resolved to lay aside all books except the Bible, and to devote my whole time to prayer and reading until I experienced a favourable change" (Berkhof, Assurance, 50).

4. **God's Work: The Work of God (in you)**

a. Ten marks

- i. We walk in the light (1 Jn.1:6)
- ii. We acknowledge our sins (1 Jn.1:7, 9)
- iii. We go to the advocate when we do sin (1 Jn.2:1)
- iv. We keep the commandments (1 Jn.2:3)
- v. We reject the evil world (1 Jn.2:15)
- vi. We purify our hearts in light of Christ's second coming (1 Jn.3:2-3)
- vii. We do not live lawless lives (1 Jn.3:4)
- viii. We love other Christians (1 Jn.3:10; 2:9-11)
- ix. God helps us discern between spiritual truth and error (1 Jn.4:1-3)
- x. The world hates us (1 Jn.3:13)

b. Ten Questions (Don Whitney)

- i. Do you thirst for God?
- ii. Are you governed increasingly by God's Word?
- iii. Are you more loving?
- iv. Are you more sensitive to God's presence?
- v. Do you have a growing spiritual concern for the temporal and spiritual needs of others?
- vi. Do you delight in the bride of Christ?
- vii. Are the spiritual disciplines increasingly important to you?
- viii. Do you still grieve over sin?
- ix. Are you a quicker forgiver?
- x. Do you yearn for heaven and to be with Jesus?

5. **God's Witness: The Witness of God**

- a. The Holy Spirit testifies **to** our Spirit (Rom.8:15-17)

Romans 8:15-16 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. ¹⁶ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

- b. The Holy Spirit testifies **through** our spirit

Galatians 4:6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

The mother whose heart is actually bound up in her child does not need, in order to convince herself that she has parental love, to reflect upon an approved catalogue of the fruits of parental love. The outgoing of her heart to her offspring is an immediate experience of parental love, an original knowledge which reflection may ratify, but to whose vivacity and certainty it can add little or nothing. So spiritual emotions and affections in the heart – the feeling of trust, the blended reverence and confidence, the joyful complacency which accompanies the thought of God, the thirst for divine fellowship, and the sense of that fellowship – irradiate one's relation to God before time is taken for any formal induction. (Sheldon quoted in Assurance by Berkhof, 60).

Sit not down without assurance. Get alone, and bring thy heart to the bar of trial: force it to answer the interrogatories put to it to set the qualifications of the saints on one side, and the qualifications of thyself on the other side, and then judge what resemblance there is between them.... Yet be sure thou judge by a true touchstone, and mistake not the Scripture description of a saint, that thou neither acquit nor condemn thyself by mistake (Richard Baxter).