

The Theology of the Westminster Standards

WCF 14.3 – The Degrees of Saving Faith

“Q. What is faith in Jesus Christ? A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.” (WSC 86)

I. Introduction

A. The Source and Strengthening of Saving Faith (WCF 14.1)

The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened. (WCF 14.1)

1. Saving faith is a “grace” (i.e., a gift of God).
2. Saving faith is worked in the elect by the power of the Holy Spirit, sent by Christ.
3. Saving faith is the means by which we are saved.
4. Saving faith is produced by hearing the gospel, strengthened by the sacraments and prayer.

B. The Acts of Saving Faith (WCF 14.2)

By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word ... and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth ... But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace. (WCF 14.2)

1. Saving faith “looks to,” “comes to,” “eats/drinks,” and “accepts/receives/rests on” Christ alone.
2. Through Christ, saving faith “radiates” out to receive and respond to God’s multifaceted Word.
 - a. **1 Thess 2:13** – *“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”*

II. The Degrees of Saving Faith

This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory: growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance, through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith. (WCF 14.3)

A. Though faith’s object is always sure and strong, faith itself can vary “in degrees” of strength.

1. How does the distinction between “union” and “communion” help us understand how and why faith changes in this way?

“While union with Christ is something that does not ebb and flow, one’s experience of communion with Christ can fluctuate.” – Kelly Kopic, professor at Covenant College

2. What are some practical things that have caused your faith to be “different in degrees, weak or strong”?
 - a. **Rom 4:19–21** – “[Abraham] did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body ...²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”
 - b. **Matt 6:30** – “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”
 - c. **Matt 14:31** – “Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’”
 - d. **Eph 6:16** – “In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one ...”
- B. While faith may be weakened, there is a “victory” for Christians. Even the presence of saving faith is itself a kind of “victory that overcomes the world.”
 1. What are some biblical reasons you can think of that assure us that our faith will “get the victory”? What do you know about the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit that helps you here?
 - a. **1 John 5:4–5** – “For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”
- C. How does WCF 14.3 say that we reach “the attainment of a full assurance”? How should this comfort you when your faith is weak?

“... the root of faith can never be torn from the godly breast, but clings so fast to the inmost parts that, however faith seems to be shaken or to bend this way or that, its light is never so extinguished or snuffed out that it does not at least lurk as it were beneath the ashes ... When, therefore, faith is shaken it is like a strong soldier forced by the violent blow of a spear to move his foot and to give ground a little. When faith itself is wounded it is as if the soldier’s shield were broken at some point from the thrust of the spear, but not in such a manner as to be pierced. For the godly mind will always rise up so as to say with David, ‘If I walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evils, for thou art with me’”
 – John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.21.

“The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” – Luke 17:5