

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 18.1–2 – The Certainty and Grounds of Assurance

“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 5:13

“The being in a state of grace will yield a man a heaven hereafter, but the seeing of himself in this state will yield him both a heaven here and a heaven hereafter.” – Thomas Brooks

I. Introduction

A. The Hard Road Some Christians Sometimes Walk

Nevertheless, they [i.e., the saints] may ... fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they ... come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves. (WCF 17.3)

B. The Wrong Road Some Non-Christians Sometimes Walk

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) ... (WCF 18.1)

1. **Job 8:11–14** – *“Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh? Can reeds flourish where there is no water? ¹² While yet in flower and not cut down, they wither before any other plant. ¹³ Such are the paths of all who forget God; the hope of the godless shall perish. ¹⁴ His confidence is severed, and his trust is a spider’s web.”*

II. The Certainty of Assurance (WCF 18.1)

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. (WCF 18.1)

- A. Chad Van Dixhoorn writes, “There is 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.” Why is this?

1. **Phil 2:1–2** – *“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”*

- B. What might be a risk if we seek assurance by looking only to the fruits of our faith and obedience?

III. The Grounds of Assurance (WCF 18.2)

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. (WCF 18.2)

- A. Does God want his children to have assurance of faith (see 1 John 5:13)? What benefit is there to having assurance of faith?
- B. What does the WCF 18.2 say grounds the believer's "infallible assurance of faith"? How does this free us from endless "navel-gazing"?
1. **Titus 1:2–3** – "... in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began ³ and at the proper time manifested in his word ..."

"He [i.e., God the Holy Spirit] writes first all graces in us, and then teacheth our consciences to read his handwriting, which we could never do without his light." – Thomas Goodwin

2. **Rom 8:15–17** – "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!' ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."
 3. **2 Cor 1:21–22** – "And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."
- C. Some claim that only a few people are able to have this assurance, and that only in old age. How would you respond to this claim?

FURTHER READING:

- Jeremiah Montgomery, *Walking Toward the Dawn: Finding Certainty in our Christian Experience* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2021)

"One may wander long in the valley of the shadow of doubt. But we need not despair. Not all who wander are lost." – Jeremiah Montgomery

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