

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 18.4 – The Fluctuations of Assurance

“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. Review

A. The Certainty of Assurance (WCF 18.1)

Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves ... yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, ... 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)

1. **John 20:30–31** – *“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*
2. **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.”*

B. The Nature and 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 ...” (WCF 18.2)

1. The reliability of the promise-making God (*“... the divine truth of the promises of salvation...”*)
 - a. *“The word of God, then, is a sure truth, and in itself authoritative (self-worthy of trust).”*
– John Calvin
2. The inward evidence of faith in Christ and (faulty, but true) obedience (1 John 4:7).
 - a. **Phil 2:1** – *“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love ...”*
3. The testimony of the Holy Spirit that we are a child of God (Rom 8:15–16)

C. The Experience of Assurance

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 ... 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 ... (WCF 18.3)

II. The Fluctuations of Assurance (WCF 18.4)

True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted [i.e., temporarily lost]; as, [1] by negligence in preserving of it, [2] by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; [3] by some sudden or vehement temptation, [4] 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. (WCF 18.4)

- A. What do each of the various causes of struggle with assurance look like?
- B. What “glimmers of godliness” or “sparks of salvation” does the Confession say should keep the Christian from utter despair?
1. **Job 13:15** – *“Though he slay me, I will hope in him ...”*
 2. **Ps 73:15–17** – *“If I had said, ‘I will speak thus,’ I would have betrayed the generation of your children. ¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, ¹⁷ until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.”* – He’s still going to worship!
 3. **Luke 22:31–32** – *“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”* – Many can testify to this!
- C. Read Micah 7:5–9. What is it about God or His Word that can you look to in times of doubt such that Micah’s words can be come your own?
- D. How would you describe your own assurance? Do you give God thanks for it? What can you do to grow in the assurance that God desires for you?

“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