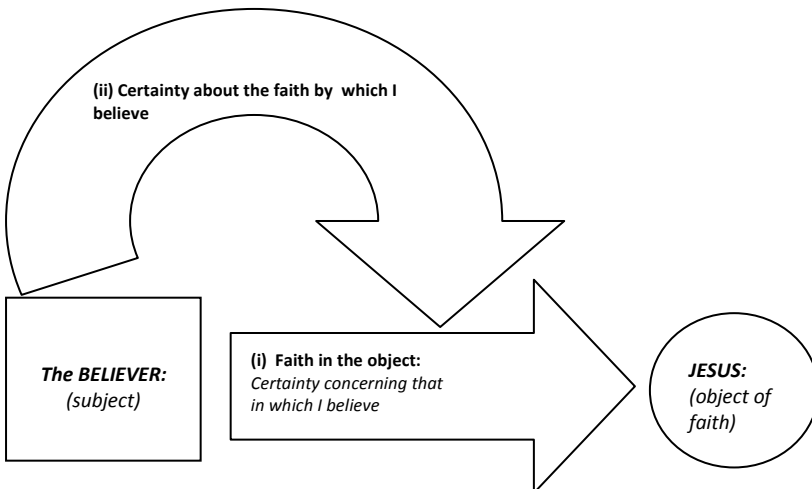


14. ASSURANCE – HOW CAN I BE SURE THAT I'M A CHRISTIAN?

ROMANS 8:1-15

1. WHAT IS ASSURANCE?

- Assurance = the felt and subjective certainty that I am a Christian
- A key distinction: **saving faith and assurance are not the same**
 - (i) **saving faith** = "I trust in Jesus" = direct certainty
 - (ii) **assurance** = "I know that I trust in Jesus" = reflex certainty



2. WHY DO REAL BELIEVERS LACK ASSURANCE?

(a) Sin clouds self-knowledge

(b) God removes assurance in loving discipline

Hebrews 12:6,10, “the Lord disciplines those he loves... God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness”

2 Chronicles 32:31, “God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart”

(c) Faulty understanding of the Gospel

e.g. 1 Thess. 4:13ff, 2 Thess. 2:2

(d) Not cultivating faith in Christ

Hebrews 5:11-6:12

(e) Other sins or disobedience

e.g. Psalm 51:11, “Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.”

(f) Various human frailties: suffering, depression, temperament, dementia

3. DO I NEED TO EXPERIENCE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION?

(a) No. Only saving faith is necessary for salvation

e.g. John 5:24, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

(b) Yes. Assurance is possible and desirable

1 John 5:13, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (Also 2:3, 3:14, 4:13)

Romans 8:38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

4 FROM WHERE DOES ASSURANCE OF SALVATION COME?

Romans 8:15-16, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

Galatians 4:6, "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father"."

(a) From God the Holy Spirit

(b) In the heart

(c) Through the Scriptures

"The Holy Spirit doesn't whisper in your ear, "You're a Christian," because you could doubt that voice, couldn't you? You could say, "I think that was my pizza last night," or "It was the devil." The witness of the Holy Spirit is not a whispering in your ear. The witness of the Holy Spirit is the work of the Holy Spirit enabling you to look at Christ, feel him as your own, see him as precious, and say Galatians 2:20 personally: "I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." It's that *me* that is the settling of our assurance." John Piper - <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/how-can-i-know-if-my-repentance-is-genuine>

SUMMARY: EXTRACTS FROM THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 5 – Providence

5. The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave for a season His own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption, and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.

Chapter 14 – Saving Faith

3. 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.

Chapter 18 – Of the assurance of grace and salvation

1. Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour 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, endeavouring 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.

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.

3. 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.

4. 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.