

## 12. The perseverance of the saints, and assurance of grace and salvation

### WCF chapters 17-18 *Modern Language version – 1993 – OPC*

#### Perseverance

17.1. Those whom God has accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere in it to the end and be eternally saved.

2. The perseverance of the saints does not depend upon their own free will, but on the unchangeableness of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; on the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; on the continuing presence of the Spirit and the seed of God within them; and on the nature of the covenant of grace. These are grounds of the certainty and infallibility of their perseverance.

3. Nevertheless, they may—through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the pervasiveness of the corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means by which they are to be preserved—fall into grievous sins and for a time continue in them. In so doing they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit; some measure of God's graces and comforts is taken from them; they have their hearts hardened and their consciences wounded; they harm others and give them occasion to sin, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

#### Assurance

18.1. Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and fleshly presumptions that they are in God's favor and in a state of salvation, this hope of theirs will perish. Nevertheless, those who truly believe on the Lord Jesus, love him sincerely, and strive to live 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, a hope that shall never make them ashamed.

#### **What God has done... and what God will do**

Redemption applied

What God has begun, he will complete, Philippians 1:6, John 10:28-29

We persevere:

- no room for disobedience / worldly Christians, 2 Peter 1:10, 1 John 3:9
- we continue to trust and obey Christ, 1 Peter 1:5,9

#### **How do Christians persevere?**

Not simply because of a decision of OUR wills...

But because of God's will and work

- the Father's loving choice, John 17:11,24
- the Son's perfect sacrifice & intercession, Heb. 7:25
- the Spirit's presence & help, John 14:16-17, 1 Jn 3:9
- the certainty of the Covenant, Jer. 32:38-40

The reality of serious sin

- real Christians battle sin, the world & the devil
- e.g Peter (Matt. 26:70-74) or King David (Ps. 51)
- Consequences: it grieves the Spirit (Eph. 4:30)... affects our relationship with God (e.g. Ps 51:8-12)... hurts others... invites the Lord's discipline (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:32)

#### **Hypocrites/fake Christians... and true believers**

The reality of Hypocrisy:

e.g. Matt. 7:22-23 – their assurance is in vain

True believers:

Christians CAN really know that they ARE Christians

- Do you trust, love and seek to obey Jesus?
- Then be assured!

The "1 John" tests:

- His aim = assurance, 1 John 5:13
- "trust", "obey", "love the brethren", 2:3, 3:14-24

2. This certainty is not merely a conjectural and probable persuasion grounded on a fallible hope, but an infallible assurance of faith, founded on the divine truth of the promises of salvation, on the evidence in our hearts that the promised graces are present, and on the fact that the Spirit of adoption witnesses with our spirits that we are God's children. The Holy Spirit, by whom we are sealed for the day of redemption, is the pledge of our inheritance.

3. This infallible assurance does not so belong to the essence of faith but that a true believer may wait long and contend with many difficulties before he partakes of it. Yet, because he is enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given to him by God, he may—without any extraordinary revelation—attain this assurance by a proper use of the ordinary means. It is therefore the duty of everyone to be very diligent in making certain that God has called and chosen him. By such diligence his heart may grow in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties which obedience to God requires—the proper fruits of this assurance. Thus it is far from inclining men to carelessness.

4. True believers may have the assurance of their salvation shaken, diminished, or temporarily lost in various ways: as by negligence in preserving it, by falling into some special sin which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit, by some sudden or violent temptation, or by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance and allowing even those who reverence him to walk in darkness and have no light. Yet, true believers are never completely deprived of that seed of God and life of faith, that love for Christ and fellow believers, that sincerity of heart and conscience concerning duty, out of which—by the operation of the Spirit—this assurance may in due time be revived; and by which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair.

### What kind of assurance?

NOT an “educated guess” or “likely bet”... but a certainty: e.g. “full assurance of hope”, Heb. 6:11-19

Because of God's promises AND the internal evidence of God at work:

- As he works “grace”/godliness in us, 2 Pet. 1:4-11, 1 John 2:3, 3:14
- The Spirit directly assures us of salvation, Romans 8:15-16

### An unsure faith, and the fight for assurance

\*\* *assurance* of salvation is not necessary to be saved: for many it is a struggle, e.g. Mark 9:24, Ps. 77, Ps. 88

Real Christians *can* grow in assurance:

- not by “extraordinary revelation”
- but as the Spirit uses “ordinary means”: Bible, prayer, church, sermons, communion, the Lord's people

Q: Does assurance encourage sin? No!

As we pursue God... we grow in love and thankfulness, Titus 2:11, 12,14

### Why do we struggle with doubt about salvation?

“shaken, diminished, temporarily lost”...

Because of

- sin / carelessness: neglecting the means of grace... persisting in some sin... or crumbling under a “sudden or violent temptation”
- our sovereign God: sometimes He makes us walk in the dark, e.g. Ps. 88, 31:22

### Light in the darkness

Even if we feel deserted we are *never* without hope: we continue to trust and to love... may experience the kindling of assurance... and are kept from utter despair

Personal response: for what should we give thanks... confess... pray?