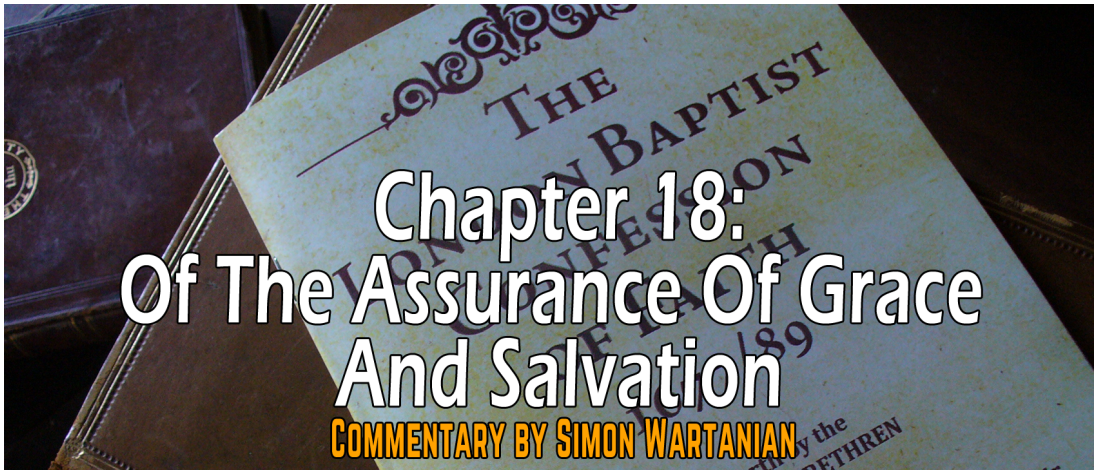
1689 Baptist Confession Chapter 18: Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation - Commentary

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Chapter 18: Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation

In many ways, this chapter depends on the previous chapter about the **Perseverance of the Saints** and we concluded in the previous chapter that the doctrine is indeed biblical. If eternal security is biblical for those who are regenerate and have true faith, may we conclude that God is willing that they have the assurance of salvation and have confidence that they will be with God forever? The answer of this chapter is "yes." The majority of texts for the doctrine of perseverance, at the same time, are texts about the assurance that we are called to have in Scripture, therefore, I will reference the exegesis of the relevant texts in the previous chapter.

§1 Although temporary believers, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves

1. Although **temporary believers, and other unregenerate men,** may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and state of salvation, **which hope of theirs shall perish; 1** 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**
    1. Job 8:13, 14; Jer. 17:9; Matt. 7:21-23; Luke 18:10-14; John 8:41; Eph. 5:6-7; Gal. 6:3, 7-9[1]
    2. Rom. 5:2, 5; 8:16; 1 John 2:3; 3:14, 18-19, 24; 5:13; 2 Peter 1:10

Chapter 14 on faith also talks about **temporary believers** (**chapter 14:3**), but this time the Confession speaks about them in connection with assurance. As their faith was false and carnal, so their assurance is likewise false. They **vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions** (John 8:41; Gal. 6:3, 7-9). This is the greatest self-deception and most terrifying thing, namely, to think that you are in right-standing with God, but in truth, you are not. This is a perishable **hope**.

But there is true hope and a true assurance. This is for them that **truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity**. They are described as those **endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him** (Rom. 7:24-25). They desire and try to walk uprightly before God. They are not they that **deceive themselves with false hopes**, but seek to

obey and please God from the heart. These **may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace** (1 John 5:13). How beautiful is the phrase **certainly assured**! We may have certainty and assurance of our being **in the state of grace** and at peace with God. Those who **truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity**...**may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God** (Rom. 5:2). This is nothing like the **false hopes** which the unregenerate entertain, but it is a **hope** which **shall never make them ashamed** (Rom. 5:5).

Temporary Believers

The Confession starts first with a word of warning, namely, a warning about false believers. These false believers are said to be "*temporary* believers" and are "unregenerate men." They do have assurance, but a vain and false assurance. The temporary believers are the seeds that fell on the rock in the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:13). They fell away from their profession because they had no true faith in them which is by nature lasting (1 John 2:19). Their faith was merely feel-good and not borne out sincere love for God and hatred for sin (repentance). Nowhere does Holy Scripture call such a faith true faith, because it is not. True faith perseveres and justifies forever. We may compare these temporary believers to the people who used to go to church, heard the preaching of the gospel in a manner that sounded good to them, they were called to come forward and repeat a prayer after the preacher. They did not know much about the faith, they had not been presented a clear and biblical gospel and after repeating a prayer they were told that they were saved. Such people are told to "accept" Jesus into their hearts and pray (or better, repeat after the preacher) the Sinner's Prayer to be saved. They have no root, they have not been confronted with their sin, righteousness, and judgment. For all that we know they may have heard a false and vile prosperity message and told that God will make them happy, healthy and successful. These people profess to be believers for a while. They may even have assurance in them that they will go to heaven, but their assurance consists of, as the Confession says, "false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and state of salvation". They look back to a card they signed, to a date and time, to the fact they repeated the Sinner's Prayer and etc., which true conversion and assurance does *not* consist in. They have been deceived and they deceive themselves with this false assurance. But, as the parable says, after testing, when these promises which were made to them about what God will do, do not come to pass, they reject their previous profession of the Christian faith. When trials come, they fall away and go back to the world. It does not mean that they truly believed because they had no root. But it does mean that they made some kind of profession at a particular time. Their assurance and hope are false because it is carnal and not based on the true gospel and Christ's work. See **here for more on temporary believers**.

Assurance In The State of Grace

In contrast to the temporary believers, it is said of the elect that they may "certainly [be] assured that they are in the state of grace", but what is this certainty based on? This certainty is first of all based on their faith and love for the Lord. The apostle John writes "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). Those who *now* believe in the Lord Jesus may *now* know that they *now* have eternal life (**see here** about the present possession of eternal life and perseverance). This assurance comes to us by faith. It is not wishful thinking, but rather we reflect on the object of our faith and what He has done for our sake. The faith of the elect is said to be *true* and therefore everlasting, unlike the *temporary* believers'. The elect do not merely believe in the Lord Jesus, but they "love him in sincerity". He is their hope and delight. They hate sin and desire to walk in a manner worthy of His name and calling. They know they do not yet love Him as He deserves to be loved and they war against sin, but one thing they also know is that they are loved more than they can ever imagine by their Redeemer and friend. True love moves to action. The Lord told His disciples that true love shows itself in obedience saying, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). You cannot rightly love God and not desire to keep His commandments. Desiring to keep His commandments is part of the very nature of the New Covenant wherein the law of God is written on our hearts and we are moved by His Spirit to obedience (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27; Heb. 13:20-21). Our obedience is an evidence that we truly know Him and thus have eternal life. The same apostle writes:

> 1 John 2:3 And **by this we know** that **we have come to know him**, **if we keep his commandments.**

Notice what is *not* said. It is not said that we come to know Him *by* keeping His commandments and thereby turning salvation into works. But rather the text says that the manner we truly come to know, that we have salvation (see John 17:3), is if we keep His commandments. The desire and willingness to obey God from the heart and with joy, not merely because of duty, is a sure evidence that the person is a child of God, for no child of the devil, however deep their hypocrisy, does the will of God with all joy and diligence, for they are not able (Rom. 8:7-8).

To find assurance we look at our faith to see if God is working in us His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). True obedience comes as a result of God's grace working in us, and not human effort. When we see the fruit of our faith, we are thankful that God is

pleased to thereby grant us assurance of faith and security in Him. We seek all the more to be obedient in all areas of life. We look at our faith knowing that we're sinners saved by amazing grace and never losing the cross of Christ from sight, which is the sole basis of our salvation and assurance.

The apostle Paul writes:

> Rom. 5:1-2 Therefore, since we have been **justified by faith**, **we have peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also **obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand,** and we rejoice in **hope of the glory of God**.

1. The apostle first of all concludes from the previous discussion that justification by faith brings peace between man and God. Before this justification we were enemies, but now we are friends. This peace has come to us solely through Christ and no other Mediator. It is through His death that we were saved and it is through Him that we go to the Father with Whom, through Jesus, we have peace. To have peace means to be at rest and not afraid. The peace we have is the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, [which] will guard [our] hearts and [our] minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). This peace, which we have by justification through faith alone, is able to guard us completely and this peace is found in Christ alone. We have this peace from the moment of justification and we may *know* that we have this peace and live *knowing* that we have this peace with God through our Savior.

2. Through Jesus and His sacrifice we have by faith access "into this grace in which we stand". This speaks of the "state of grace", as the Confession says, into which, we as believers find ourselves in. We have been saved by grace and translated from a state of wrath and condemnation to a state of grace and peace. This state of grace we are standing in is because of Christ and through faith, not because of our works and performance.

3. Lastly, based on all these things we "hope of the glory of God." Here the apostle is speaking about the future and looking forward to the day that He will meet and see the glory of God. This hope is not wishful thinking, but rather this "hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). Our hope is not based on ourselves, but rather it is based upon God's work *in* us. We do not search for hope in ourselves, but rather we search for hope in the work of God *in us*. This hope is based on God's promise and word, and we will not be put to shame because we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. We are happy *now* in our hope that we will see God in the *future.* God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Spirit and the apostle later says that the Spirit "bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). This assurance is a gift of God to the believer and based on the work of God in the believer.

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§2 An infallible assurance of faith founded on the blood and righteousness of Christ

2. This **certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion** grounded upon a fallible hope, but an **infallible assurance of faith** **1** **founded on the blood and righteousness of Christ** revealed in the Gospel; **2** and also upon the **inward evidence of those graces of the Spirit** unto which promises are made, **3** and on the **testimony of the Spirit of adoption,** witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God; **4** and, as a fruit thereof, **keeping the heart both humble and holy.** **5**
    1. Rom. 5:2, 5; Heb. 6:11, 19-20; 1 John 3:2, 14; 4:16; 5:13, 19-20
    2. Heb. 6:17-18; 7:22; 10:14, 19
    3. Matt. 3:7-10; Mark 1:15; 2 Peter 1:4-11; 1 John 2:3; 3:14, 18-19, 24; 5:13
    4. Rom. 8:15-16; 1 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 4:6-7
    5. 1 John 3:1-3

Paragraph 1 defined what this certainty consists in, namely, being "certainly assured that [we] are in the state of grace". Paragraph 2 goes on to describe the ground of this assurance. **This certainty is not a bare conjectural** (i.e., guesswork) and **probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope**. It is an assurance grounded upon the work of God in us. It is not a **fallible hope**, but an **infallible assurance of faith**. It is therefore grounded upon a true and lasting hope from God. It is **founded on the blood and righteousness of Christ**. His righteousness is our only hope and consolation to stand before God and remain in the state of grace. From the beginning until the end, the righteousness of Christ is the only ground on which we can stand. It is also grounded upon the work of **the Spirit** in us, the **graces** which He works in us. He is also called **the Spirit of adoption** because He witnesses **with our spirits that we are the children of God**. What is amazing

is that this assurance keeps **the heart both humble and holy**. We are not arrogant because of this assurance, because it does not depend on us and does not have its ground in us. If it did, then we would have a reason to boast. But since it is all the work of God, we cannot boast in ourselves, but we will surely boast and glory in God.

What Assurance Is Founded On

Assurance is not founded upon the guesswork (conjectural) and probable persuasion of the believer, but it is rather founded upon the work of God *within* and *for* the believer. This paragraph points us to the *infallible* assurance which we have about our salvation in Christ. In the words of Dr. Waldron:

> The single and basic emphasis of this paragraph is that assurance, genuine assurance, is infallible. The term 'infallible' comes from two Latin words which mean, literally, 'not deceiving', i.e. not liable to mistakes or deception, incapable of error, not liable to fail. The Confession is asserting that there is an assurance of salvation which will not deceive us, about which we cannot be mistaken, which goes beyond mere probability. This should reassure the one who says, 'I want to have assurance, but I am so fearful of being mistaken and deceiving myself.' There is an assurance of salvation which you may have, which will not deceive you, which is infallible.[2]

Blood and Righteousness of Christ

Our assurance is founded upon Christ's perfect work on behalf of His people by which He has perfected and sanctified us forever (Heb. 10:10, 14) and thereby He has set us apart for the honorable use of God. We know that we are not saved because of our works and our performance, but solely because of Christ's work on our behalf which should be the basis of our assurance. I know that I am saved, know God, or better – I'm known by God, not because I have seen the list of God's elect, or had an extraordinary revelation, but because I trust in Christ alone for my salvation. I have no righteousness of my own, but God has supplied me with the perfect righteousness of Christ. I may feel like I'm filthy, but God sees me clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ and therefore, based on that I'm acceptable to God. I believe that it is God Who works in me to do His pleasure. Anything good that comes from me, comes because God is at work in me and not because of my efforts. The reason that I seek to be obedient is not because of my free will, but because God is very gracious to me and wants my good, which is staying within His will for His glory. See my comments on the book of Hebrews in the chapter on Perseverance about the perfect work of Christ on behalf of His people, which is the basis of our assurance (**see here**).

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Our hope and infallible assurance are also founded upon the inward work of the Spirit. These promises, which are the promises of the gospel, include the promise that we *may* and *can* know that we have eternal life and know God (e.g., 1 John 2:3; 3:24; 5:13). These promises are believed and held onto by us because of the grace of the Holy Spirit leading us to stand firm upon God's promises. An important part of the Spirit's work in the child of God is witnessing that *we are* children of God. The apostle Paul expresses that in the following words:

> Rom. 8:13-17 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if **by the Spirit** you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are **led by the Spirit of God** are **sons of God**. 15 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.

God is truly amazing Who not only sent His Son to die in our place but give us His Spirit and pours out upon us blessings which we cannot comprehend. Why? Not because of anything in us, that's for sure!

1. To be "led by the Spirit" means "by the Spirit" putting "to death the deeds of the body" and thereby we show evidences that we are children of God because God will lead His children as the Shepherd leads his sheep. If we do not have the Spirit we do not even belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9)! But if we have the Spirit we belong to Christ and we have the ability and willingness to resist sin (Rom. 8:4-5, Gal. 5:16-17). Therefore, if we seek to obey God and walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) we thereby show fruit that we belong to Christ and are children of the Most High God. We do not become children by obeying God and walking by the Spirit, but rather, if these things are true in our lives, they are true because they are evidences that we are children of God and are saved. They are *fruits* of salvation and not *causes* of salvation.

2. The Spirit here is said to be the Spirit of adoption. He is the Spirit through Whom we are adopted into the family of God. He is the Spirit Who initiates our adoption and brings us into the family of God. He is the Spirit through Whom God's love comes to us (Rom. 5:5) and through Whom we are regenerated (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5; etc.). He is not the Spirit of slavery, but rather of freedom, love, and peace. It is through the Spirit that we understand the things of God (1 Cor. 2:12-14) and it is through the Spirit that we are able to know that God is our Father and seek to understand what that means.

3. The Holy Spirit in us bears testimony along with our own human spirit that we indeed belong to God. We ourselves are not sufficient witnesses of this and this is why the Spirit gives us assurance of our adoption and inclusion into God's family, and thereby we have the assurance of salvation. Our spirit bears testimony in the sense that we ask ourselves about where all our confidence and hope is placed, is it upon ourselves or upon the work of Christ? What is our sole hope in life and death? But if it was not the Spirit at the same time testifying to us, then we would not able to have any assurance. John Calvin wrote:

> ...Paul means, that the Spirit of God gives us such a testimony, that when he is our guide and teacher, our spirit is made assured of the adoption of God: for our mind of its own self, without the preceding testimony of the Spirit, could not convey to us this assurance. There is also here an explanation of the former verse; for when the Spirit testifies to us, that we are the children of God, he at the same time pours into our hearts such confidence, that we venture to call God our Father. And doubtless, since the confidence of the heart alone opens our mouth, except the Spirit testifies to our heart respecting the paternal love of God, our tongues would be dumb, so that they could utter no prayers. For we must ever hold fast this principle, — that we do not rightly pray to God, unless we are surely persuaded in our hearts, that he is our Father, when we so call him with our lips. To this there is a corresponding part, — that our faith has no true evidence, except we call upon God. It is not then without reason that Paul, bringing us to this test, shows that it then only appears how truly any one believes, when they who have embraced the promise of grace, exercise themselves in prayers.[3]

This infallible assurance, rather than leading us to arrogance, leads us to humility; rather than leading us to sin, it leads us to holiness. The saint of God who has this blessed assurance does not need to be taught in this because he knows that he has no reason to be arrogant because this blessed assurance is a gift from God granted to Him and is not based on anything in himself. The saint of God has the Spirit of God in himself, Who wages war against the flesh and therefore, cannot live in continual sin (Gal. 5:17ff; c.f. 1 John 3:9). He will rather be led to a life of holiness because of the great display of grace from God toward him whereby he will seek to preach this amazing gospel to others so that they too may come to know God and have this unshakable peace, which is founded upon Christ the Victor.

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§3 This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith

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; **1** 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 means,** attain thereunto: **2** and therefore it is the duty of every one 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 Spirit, 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.**3**
    1. Acts 16:30-34; 1 John 5:13
    2. Rom. 8:15-16; 1 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 4:4-6 with 3:2;1 John 4:13; Eph. 3:17-19; Heb. 6:11-12; 2 Peter 1:5-11
    3. 2 Peter 1:10; Ps. 119:32; Rom. 15:13; Neh. 8:10; 1 John 4:19, 16; Rom. 6:1-2, 11-13; 14:17; Titus 2:11-14

This infallible assurance does not come directly nor **doth...so belong to the essence of faith**. In other words, just because someone has faith does not mean they also have and know of this infallible assurance. They do have assurance if they have true faith, but they do not have a knowledge of it or they do not embrace it. These two are different. All believers will certainly remain in the state of grace. But not all believers know or live in light of this infallible assurance. Therefore, **a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties** before he attains that assurance. We do not need **extraordinary revelation** to know of this assurance. But the **Spirit** enables us to come to know of this assurance through **the right use of means** (1 John 5:13 "these things"). God has given us His Word and Spirit whereby we may know of and embrace this assurance. The Bible calls us to make our **calling and election sure** (2 Pet. 1:10), therefore, it is

the **duty of every one** to seek to have this assurance of faith and salvation. This is so that **his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, in love and thankfulness to God**. It is such an amazing grace to know that we are saved and may be assured of our eternal salvation. It is such a fountain that can endlessly bring forth praise unto God for His amazing grace toward us. Instead of leading us to **looseness**, it leads us to more **obedience** toward God as a sign of thankfulness for His amazing grace.

Seek Assurance!

Assurance is not definitional or essential to the nature of saving faith. Some people are truly saved, have true faith, but do not have assurance. This means nothing to their eternal salvation, though it may have effects on the way they live now. The Confession says that infallible assurance is not essential to true faith. Even though it is not essential, yet God calls us to make our calling and election sure and thereby have the assurance of salvation and grace. It is true that many saints have struggled and struggle with assurance and God may not give them assurance, or may give it to them later, yet all believers are nonetheless called to seek this assurance. We are commanded by Scripture to do so. This assurance may be attained even without any "extraordinary revelation", but rather by the "right use of means" which God has given us to know if we are believers, these include the focus of our faith, the testimony of the Spirit to our spirit, obedience from the heart to God, etc. My favorite passage on assurance is 2 Peter 1 wherein the apostle writes:

> 2 Pet. 1:3-10 His divine power has **granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness**, through the knowledge of him who **called us to his own glory and excellence**, 4 by which he has granted to us **his precious and very great promises**, so that through them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 5 **For this very reason, make every effort** to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these **qualities are yours and are increasing**, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers, be **all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election**, for if you **practice these qualities you will never fall**.

1. It is God, and God by His divine power, Who has granted us everything necessary for our salvation and sanctification. He has given us by grace everything that is necessary for us to live godly lives in Jesus Christ including His Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures (2Tim. 3:16-17). The way that God did this was through giving us His knowledge. God did this when He saved us, when we received the knowledge of truth in sincerity and faith. Furthermore, God is described as the One Who effectually called (**see chapter 10**) and summoned the believer to "his own glory and excellence". God summoned the believer to partake of the divine nature, to share in His joy and life. God, Who in eternity past existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; ever-glorious, ever-joyful and ever-excellent, has promised those who deserve nothing but His wrath to share in Himself and His joy. It is God Who called us and His call is irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). It is God Who has granted us His knowledge through which we were saved and were granted all that we need for life and godliness. It is all the work of God.

2. The purpose for the "precious and very great promises" of God is that we "become partakers of the divine nature." Does that mean that we become God? No. The apostle "intended to say that when divested of all the vices of the flesh, we shall be partakers of divine and blessed immortality and glory, so as to be as it were one with God as far as our capacities will allow."[3] John Gill comments on this:

> **that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature;** not essentially, or of the essence of God, so as to be deified, this is impossible, for the nature, perfections, and glory of God, are incommunicable to creatures; nor, hypostatically and personally, so as the human nature of Christ, in union with the Son of God, is a partaker of the divine nature in him; but by way of resemblance and likeness, the new man or principle of grace, being formed in the heart in regeneration, after the image of God, and bearing a likeness to the image of his Son, and this is styled, Christ formed in the heart, into which image and likeness the saints are more and more changed, from glory to glory, through the application of the Gospel, and the promises of it, by which they have such sights of Christ as do transform them, and assimilate them to him; and which resemblance will be perfected hereafter, when they shall be entirely like him, and see him as he is:[4]

Matthew Poole notes on this passage:

That by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature: we are said to be partakers of the Divine nature, not by any communication of the Divine essence to us, but by God's impressing upon us, and infusing into us, those divine qualities and dispositions (knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness) which do express and resemble the perfections of God, and are called his image, Eph 4:24; Col 3:10. And we are said to be made partakers of this Divine nature by the promises of the gospel, because they are the effectual means of our regeneration, (in which that Divine nature is communicated to us), by reason of that quickening Spirit which accompanieth them, 2Co 3:6, works by them, and forms in us the image of that wisdom, righteousness, and holiness of God, which appear in them; or of that *glory of the Lord,* which when by faith we behold in the glass of gospel promises, we are *changed into the same image, even as by the Spirit of the Lord,* 2Co 3:18. Or,

the Divine nature may be understood of the glory and immortality of the other life, wherein we shall be conformed to God, and whereof by the promises we are made partakers.[5]

The purpose of God in this is that we may share in His holiness (Heb. 12:10), become like He is in holiness and righteousness without sin. We escape from the corruption of the world and instead become partakers of the divine nature. This is the purpose of God in giving us "his precious and very great promises". We escape the "sinful nature" to partake and be like God in holiness and *un*-sinfulness.

3. This is the reason and the goal to look forward to, namely, that we may escape the corruption of the world and partake of the divine nature, that we should seek to grow. The apostle calls us to do everything in our power to grow in the faith and he lists some qualities and virtues which he says *testify* to us (if they're found in us) that we are called and elect. The apostle names these things individually and links them together because these things are supplemental and belong to our faith. These things grow *out* of our faith, if indeed it is true and living faith. We should not see these virtues and qualities as things which are disconnected from each other, but rather virtues growing out of each other. The apostle mentions the following:

- faith with virtue
    - virtue with knowledge
        - knowledge with self-control
            - self-control with steadfastness
                - steadfastness with godliness
                    - godliness with brotherly affection
                        - brotherly affection with love

4. In v. 8, the apostle calls upon the believers to examine themselves (2 Cor. 13:5) and see whether these qualities are in them or not. Notice that Peter does not speak about a one-time test, but rather the development of these qualities is a process. They do not pop-up together at one time and that's it. Rather, we should seek them as we seek to obey God in all things, asking Him to grant such excellencies to us for the sake of His Name. The apostle calls on the believers to see whether these qualities are present, but also if they are *increasing* and thereby meaning that we cannot attain the 100% of these qualities, but as long as we live this life, there is always room for improvement and more of these qualities. The qualities in us which are granted by God, Who gives us all that we need for life and godliness, including these qualities, are given so that we will be fruitful and effective in Jesus Christ our Lord (see John 15:16). They are given so that we may have an impact on the world. They are not given solely for our sake, but they are given us so that we may serve others with them.

5. But the one who professes to be a believer and lacks these qualities is blind, meaning that he cannot see his spiritual possession and thus cannot have true assurance. If he is blind and forgotten the "the cleansing from his past sins" he has no reason to think that he's a believer or that he has true assurance of calling and election.

6. Now we finally come to v. 10. The apostle begins the verse with a conclusion ("therefore") on what was said in the foregoing verses concerning these qualities and the partaking of the divine nature and calls his audience to action. The believers should be "all the more diligent" and "make every effort" (HCSB, NET) to confirm two things: 1) their calling and 2) their election. The Greek word "confirm" (ESV, HCSB), "sure" (KJV, NET), "certain" (ISV, NASB) is the adjective βέβαιος (*bebaios,* G949) which means "stable, fast, firm"[6]. The adverb is defined by Dr. Mounce as "*firm, stable, steadfast,* Heb. 3:4; 6:19; *sure, certain, established,* Rom. 4:16"[7] and the verb (βεβαιόω, *babaioo*) which sheds more light upon the meaning of the adjective as "*to confirm, establish; to render constant and unwavering,* 1 Cor. 1:8; *to strengthen* or *establish* by arguments or proofs, *ratify*, Mk. 16:20; *to verify*, as promises, Rom. 15:8"[8]. The idea is clearly communicated through this word that we may have assurance and certainty of our salvation, or more specifically—of our election and calling. A usual objection to the **doctrine of election** is that we can never know that we're elect, but apparently the apostle Peter had other ideas, namely that we can be stable, firm, sure and certain about our *election* and calling. The nearest reference to "calling" is in v. 3 where we read that God "called us to his own glory and excellence" and the apostle says that if these qualities are *in us* and are *increasing*, we may have certainty in this. These qualities are proof that we are chosen

and called by God. We can be assured that we are chosen and called *if* we practice these qualities. If these fruits are not in our lives then we have no ground of assurance, but only vain and false hopes. But if these things are indeed in us and are developing, then there is no way that we can fall away from the faith.

7. The apostle here calls everyone to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith. The one who lacks these qualities should ask God Who gives generously. The one who has some of these qualities should ask God for more. The one who has these qualities should ask God to grant him growth in these qualities. These are fruits and evidences of salvation (election and calling), not grounds of salvation. Here, every believer is called upon to seek the assurance of faith and seek to increase these qualities in them. Why? Verse 11 says, "For in this way [confirming your calling and election, seeking and developing these qualities] there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

The Fruits Of Assurance

This assurance leads the true believer to more freedom in Christ and removes the fear that Christ may one day abandon him. The peace of God is truly experienced and known when we believe that no one can pluck us from His hand and that *we are* in His hand (John 10:28-29). At such a time we speak of joy and peace unspeakable knowing that God Who is sovereign over all has given us the assurance that He will never leave or forsake us, but even more that should He be pleased to take us away from this world, whenever or however He wills, we do not fear where we will be because we know that we will be at home with the Lord. This assurance, rather than producing idleness in the true believer, it encourages him and makes him more thankful for the work of the Triune God in him. The believer is thereby more thankful to God and willing to do more for God Who not only has shown him amazing grace but has granted him assurance of that grace.

These things are fruits, flowing from this infallible and blessed assurance which is based upon the work of God in and for the believer. Rather than putting the believer in a passive and uncaring mode, he is thereby moved to more love and obedience toward God.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blessed assurance control, That Christ has regarded
my helpless estate, And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

- It Is Well With My Soul

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§4 True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted

4. True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways **shaken,** **diminished**, and **intermitted**; as by negligence in preserving of it, **1** by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; **2** by some sudden or vehement temptation, **3** by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering [allowing] even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light, **4** **yet are they never destitute of the 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 preserved from utter despair. **5**
    1. Heb. 6:11-12; 2 Peter 1:5-11
    2. Ps. 51:8, 12, 14; Eph. 4:30
    3. Ps. 30:7; 31:22; 77:7-8; 116:11
    4. Isa. 50:10
    5. 1 John 3:9; Luke 22:32; Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:5; Ps. 42:5, 11

This **assurance of their salvation** may be **shaken, diminished, and intermitted**. This is because of the **negligence** of **preserving** in this assurance and often also **by falling into some special sin** (Ps. 51) and both wounding their **conscience** as well as grieving **the Spirit** (Eph. 4:30). They may experience God's **withdrawing the light of His countenance** (Ps. 30:7; 77:7-8) and leaving them for a time to see their sin before restoring them. This is also spoken of in **chapter 17:3** in connection with our perseverance. However this darkness would be or how dry this wilderness would be, yet they are **never destitute of the seed of God and life of faith** (1 John 3:9; Luke 22:32). God always remains with them and true faith is still in them. So also the **love of Christ and the brethren** and the other graces of God. **By the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived** and they be restored to the

knowledge and embrace of this blessed assurance and saved **from utter despair** (Ps. 42:11).

True believers may sometimes fall into great sins whereby they come to the false conclusion that they were never saved in the first place, rather than realize that we all are sinners and we need to renew our repentance before God and go to Him and beg for cleansing in Christ's blood and forgiveness (**see chapter 15**). We sometimes wonder how long God can tolerate us, we are amazed at how wicked we sometimes can be, yet the Lord does not smite us in His righteous wrath.

Some get their assurance "shaken, diminished and intermitted" because they neglect the means of grace by which we come to know our assurance, for example, Bible reading and communion with God in prayer. They get a season in their life where they are not that interested (anymore) in the things of God, yet because they're true believers, they will not fall away from the faith and apostatize (**see chapter 17**), but rather will come again to repentance and seek God earnestly. They cannot go on sinning, because God's Seed is in them which makes it impossible for the born-again believer to live a life of continual sin (**see comments** on 1 John 3:9 here). Even in our low times, God will not forsake us, even if we forsake Him. He is always on our side even if we think or feel that He is not and therefore He will not leave us in our sin, but rather lead us back to Him as the Good Shepherd that He is for the straying sheep.

Lord, lead us to test ourselves in light of Your Word and in light of Your work in us and for us in Jesus Christ our precious Lord and Savior. Lord, we are grateful for this blessed assurance that is ours in Jesus Christ. Thank You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Glory to the Triune! SDG.

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)

Footnotes

1. ^ *Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith which was apparently supplied by the Westminster Confession of Faith 1646.*
2. ^ *Sam E. Waldron. A Modern Exposition Of The 1689 Baptist Confession Of Faith. (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013). pp. 279-280.*
3. a, b *John Calvin. Commentaries. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
4. ^ *John Gill. Exposition of the Entire Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
5. ^ *Matthew Poole. English Annotations on the Holy Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
6. ^ *Joseph Henry Thayer's Greek Definitions. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. See reference for the Strong's number.*
7. ^ *William D. Mounce. Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words. (Zondervan, 2006). p. 1106, number 1010.*
8. ^ *Ibid., pp. 1106-1107, number 1011.*