

False Assurance: Temporary Believers and Carnal Presumption

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[0 : 00] Now, if you were here last week, you know that we began a study on the doctrine of assurance! according to the 18th chapter of the 1689 Baptist Confession.

! If you weren't here, the good news is that I provided only an overview and introduction last time. Today begins my exposition of the chapter, starting with the first sentence. In fact, the full paragraph, the first paragraph is up on the screen so you can see it as we go along. By the way, if you don't have a copy of the confession, we do have a few in the foyer out there and if we run out, just let me know and I'll make sure to get you a copy.

So the first paragraph of chapter 18 says, Temporary believers and other unregenerate men may deceive themselves in vain with false hopes and fleshly presumptions that they have God's favor and salvation, but their hope will perish.

Yet those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus and love Him sincerely, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may be certainly assured in this life that they are in a state of grace.

[1 : 15] They may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God and this hope will never make them ashamed. It is a sad and frankly, spiritually devastating fact that many believers in this world are taught that they cannot have assurance of salvation. As I said last time, the Roman Catholic Church adamantly denies the possibility of assurance. In the Council of Trent, which was in large part a response to the Protestant Reformation, they write, no one can know with a certainty of faith that he has obtained the grace of God. They go on to say, for except by special revelation, it cannot be known the grace of God. And it gets worse. In another place it says, if anyone saith that every true and justified Christian ought to believe for certain that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate, let him be anathema. Let him be cursed by God. Let the man be cursed who is convinced that he is one of

God's children. They also write, if anyone saith that man is truly absolved from his sins and justified, because that he assuredly believed himself absolved and justified, or that no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified, and that by this faith alone absolution and justification are affected, let him be anathema. Roman Catholic doctrine will not permit anyone to have assurance of their salvation.

But as I mentioned last time, they're not alone. Arminianism, for example, does not have a sound doctrine of perseverance. And when you don't have a sound doctrine of perseverance, meaning that your salvation can be lost, how can you have a true doctrine of assurance? How can you be assured of a salvation that you could lose tomorrow?

And even among some Calvinists, those who believe in the doctrines of grace as we do, may not be willing to teach the doctrine of assurance as we see it in both our confession and, of course, the Bible. Why? It's because they're so fearful of giving someone false assurance, who should not have assurance, that they will not permit anyone to have assurance. Charles Spurgeon saw this in his day, and he said, I have seen their long faces. I have heard their whining. I have read their dismal sentences in which they say something to this effect. Groan in the Lord always, and again I say groan. He that mourneth and weepeth, he that doubteth and feareth, he that distrusteth and dishonoreth his God shall be saved.

That seems to be the sum and substance of their very un-gospel-like gospel. I've mentioned to some of you that even as a child, I was confounded by some of the preachers I heard.

[4 : 34] They could spend the first 15 minutes of a sermon suggesting that if only they could have assurance, if only they knew they belonged to the people of God. But then they would preach on the preservation of God's saints for the next 30 minutes. And even as a child, I thought, I don't

understand.

If God most certainly preserves his people, why wouldn't he let them know? Why would he leave them to wrestle with doubts for their entire lives? Well, he doesn't. Again, I will say, and you will hear me say this many more times throughout the study, assurance is possible.

It is not wrong. It is not sinful to know that you belong to the redeemed family of God. For example, when the Apostle John writes his first epistle, he says this in chapter 5, verse 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.

One of the primary reasons John was writing this letter is so that they would have assurance of their salvation. That's what he explicitly says. And it might be helpful to consider the context of 1 John. John is writing to believers who have watched some of their brethren depart from the faith.

Yesterday, they were sitting next to them on the pew saying amen.

[6 : 15] There was really no question about their orthodoxy or their faith. But today, they're not here. They've left the church. And not only have they left the church, but they've renounced their orthodoxy and their faith.

And I can imagine those who remain in the church saying to themselves, Am I next? Am I truly a child of God? Is it possible for me to be sure?

And John says, Yes, it is possible. This is why I'm writing this letter to you that you may know that you have eternal life. Now, that's what John says explicitly.

But we also have so many passages where assurance leaps off the page even when it's not explicitly taught. Consider, for example, what Paul writes at the end of Romans chapter 8.

If God be for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

[7 : 22] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Goes on to say, No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now, one might argue that Paul was not teaching the doctrine of personal assurance there. He was really teaching perseverance. God will keep his people.

Yet, when Paul writes about our eternal security, he doesn't treat it as some unknown mystical concept. He's not writing about perseverance as some abstract theory that is not personally relevant to the believer.

[8 : 41] This is very personal and very real to him, and he assumes it is also real to those to whom he is writing. In fact, he says, For I am sure that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That sounds very personal to me. That's very real confidence that he has experienced. And if you want further proof that Paul most certainly had assurance, examine the entirety of his life.

Why would any man risk his life and suffer the way Paul did? Making it very clear that he knows he's not trying to earn anything from God if he didn't have assurance of his salvation.

No, he knew he belonged to God, and that compelled him to persevere. So we might say that we can have assurance because God preserves, and we persevere because we have assurance that God preserves.

Now that's the exciting part, and we'll come to that. But first we have to address the concession at the start of this chapter. Obviously the main concern of the first paragraph is to assert that true believers may have assurance in this life.

[10 : 03] But that's not where the paragraph begins. The paragraph begins with this concession, temporary believers and other unregenerate men may deceive themselves in vain with false hopes and fleshly presumptions that they have God's favor and salvation, but their hope will perish.

Now we might not be overly excited to deal with the subject of false assurance, but it really is necessary.

More than that, it's ultimately a good thing. If someone is not a true believer, the most devastating, the most tragic thing we could ever do is give them a false sense of assurance.

For example, let's say someone made a profession of faith 20 years ago. They were at a church youth conference, and all of their friends were making professions of faith, so they decided to do the same.

They were caught up in the drama and the emotion of everything that was going on, but once the conference was over, the zeal they felt, the excitement they felt vanished, and their lives settled back into the same habits and routines they had before the conference.

[11 : 24] They never really felt any anguish over their sin. They never really repented of that sin. They never truly desired or sought Christ for forgiveness.

They simply got caught up in the drama of the moment. Now, jump ahead 20 years, and let's say they're talking to a Christian, and the Christian asks, are you saved?

And the person says, well, I professed faith 20 years ago. I haven't really been back to church or read my Bible or prayed since that time.

I don't know. And the most tragic thing the Christian might say at this point is, well, if you made a profession of faith, you must be saved. Now, he thinks he's doing a benevolent thing.

He thinks he's being an encouragement to this person and dispelling all doubts, but in this case, maybe he should have doubts. He bears no fruit of true repentance.

[12 : 27] He bears no fruit of saving faith. By his own admission, he has no interest in the Savior or the Savior's people. There was one moment, one time, when he may have uttered the words, I believe in Jesus.

But that was it. Is that evidence of salvation? No. As James says, even the demons believe. And what happens when this person walks away from that conversation thinking that, hey, I must be saved?

Nothing happens. And that's the tragedy. In John chapter 8, Jesus is confronting some of the Jewish leaders.

So these are men who profess to believe in God. In fact, they are some of the most religious people on the planet. And in verse 24, Jesus says to them, I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am He, that is the Christ, the Savior, you will die in your sins.

Despite the very popular assumption in our world today, heaven is not the default destination of human beings. Unless something changes, unless a person is brought to sincere repentance and genuine faith in Christ, they will die in their sins.

[13 : 55] So the most loving thing we can say to a person who does not show any evidence of regeneration and conversion, even when they've professed belief in Jesus with their mouths, is not, I'm sure you'll be okay.

No, the most loving thing we can do is warn them and carefully articulate the gospel. As it stands, they are on a path leading to destruction, and if we have any compassion for them at all, we will not give them false assurance.

We will point them to real salvation in Christ alone, through faith alone. Pay attention as you're reading the Bible. Warnings like this are recorded over and over again.

John the Baptist says to the religious Pharisees and Sadducees, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come, bear fruit in keeping with repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father, for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

Even now, the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

[15 : 12] When Paul writes to the Corinthian church, a Christian church, mind you, he says, examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

Test yourselves, or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test. Now, why are these warnings given?

Is it because John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles, want to destroy the assurance of genuine believers? No, it's to mercifully lead false professors to true repentance and faith, and ultimately salvation.

These warnings are not given to devastate sincere Christians. They are given for the eternal welfare of false professors, and nominal Christians, and even religious people who claim to know

God, if not Christ the Son, but are, in fact, unsaved unbelievers. false believers. And that's one of the reasons this chapter of the Confession starts the way it does. It's like the authors can hardly wait to combat the Roman error of assurance, I should say, no assurance for anyone.

[16 : 29] They can hardly wait to tell sincere Christians, yes, you can have assurance, and here's how. But they have to acknowledge first that some people don't rightfully have assurance.

And the last thing those people need to be told is, you're fine, you'll be okay. No, for their own sake, they need to be told, examine yourselves to see whether you were in the faith.

Your everlasting life depends on it. So the authors of the Confession include this concession from the start to be a help to those who may have deceived themselves into thinking they are saved when in fact they are not.

Now there's at least one other reason why this concession is necessary. Not only does it protect individuals from their own false assurance, but it's also designed to protect the church.

You see, some people have a very misguided view of the local church. They think that in the name of Christian love, that if someone wants to join the church, they automatically belong.

[17 : 43] This is why you might see progressive churches waving the transgender flag outside with a sign that says everyone is welcome. But that's not a biblical prescription for the church.

First of all, the church is built on genuine professions of faith. In Matthew 16, Peter confesses, you, Jesus, are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus replies, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, the rock of that profession you just made, I will build my church.

Now, how do we know Peter's profession was genuine? Well, Jesus said, it didn't come from flesh and blood, but God the Father revealed the true identity of Christ to him.

But obviously, we're not Christ. We can't peer into someone's heart and know whether or not God has done a work in them. But that's why the Bible clarifies that a changed heart will inevitably produce a changed life.

[18 : 51] you will recognize them by their fruits. And that is why, for example, on the day of Pentecost, when 3,000 heard the Apostle Peter preached and asked brothers, what shall we do?

Peter said, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Of course, I'm not suggesting that we should build insurmountable walls around the church, but there's a fence, so to speak.

While the church is obviously made up of sinners, the church should be made up of repentant sinners. It should be made up of sinners who are growing increasingly in their holiness and in their sanctification.

There should be a clear distinction between the church and the world. And that begins with the sinner's entrance into the church and it continues throughout their entire life in the church.

This is why the New Testament teaches us to discipline one another. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul says, I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler, not even to eat with such a one.

[20 : 21] For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.

In short, there is an obligation given to the church to protect the church, if you will. We are to be a holy, set apart, sanctified people for God.

God. So it's not good for us, ultimately, to have temporary believers and other unregenerate men, as the confession says, right here among us.

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore, it's good for us, all of us, to be confronted with the reality that not everyone who claims to be a Christian is a true Christian.

It's for their good and it's for the church's good. Now, we see that the confession mentions two kinds of people who are fundamentally the same person.

[21 : 27] First, it refers to temporary believers and then it refers to other unregenerate men. Now, notice that word other. Even if someone can be categorized as a temporary believer, they are, in fact, an unregenerate person.

they are not truly saved despite their temporary profession of faith and maybe their apparent desire to follow Christ. You see, the people, excuse me, the Bible never gives a category for people who were saved and then lost their salvation.

That's simply not a possibility. As Jesus said in John 10, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

My Father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. Of course, this takes us right back to chapter 17 of the confession which addresses the doctrine of perseverance.

perseverance. Well, if temporary believers are not those who have lost their salvation, who are they? Well, they are unregenerate persons.

[22 : 45] They appeared to be believers for a time but they never were truly Christians. And let me give you some biblical examples of this.

In Matthew 17, Jesus tells the parable of the sower and when he's later explaining this parable to his disciples, he says, as for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself but endures for a while and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and it proves unprofitful.

So, there are people who respond positively to the word of Christ, receiving it even with joy, yet over time, circumstances change and they fall away, they abandon the faith and they renounce the gospel they once claimed to believe in and embrace.

That was the situation with those to whom John was writing in his first epistle. So, as he attempts to encourage them and explain how they might know that they have eternal life, he says in chapter 2, verse 18, children, it is the last hour and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.

[24 : 28] Therefore, we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.

But they went out, that it might become plain that they are all not of us. Or as J.B. Phillips paraphrased it, these men went out from our company, it is true, but they never really belonged to it.

If they had really belonged to us, they would have stayed. In fact, their going proves beyond doubt that men like that were not, our men at all.

You see, the church made up of regenerate, converted, genuine believers is of a fundamentally different substance, if you will, than these other men whom John refers to as antichrists.

they are not born again, they are not sincerely converted, they are not genuine believers, in fact, they oppose Christ, or at least they come to, which is why they are called antichrists.

[25 : 38] Now, how does John know this about them? They went out, they left the church, they abandoned the faith, they came to embrace heresy, quite openly, it would seem, and because the substance or the nature of these people was fundamentally different than that of the church, it was really only a matter of time.

Oil and water do not mix, the world and the church do not mix, so it was only a matter of time before they would leave the church, which is precisely what happened in this case. And yet, we also want to notice that at least for a while, these people were a part of the church.

They had joined themselves to the church. You can't go out unless you were once in. And these are the kinds of people that the confession refers to as temporary believers.

They appear to be believers, but their supposed faith is only temporary, and in many cases they eventually reveal their true nature. Now, having said that, there are also other unregenerate men who may deceive themselves in vain with false hopes and fleshly presumptions that they have God's favor and salvation.

So, these people are distinguished by the confession as different from those temporary believers. So, who are they? Well, they are insincere, unregenerate people who evidently do not clearly fall away.

[27 : 12] either this is a situation where they stayed joined to the church and they continue to profess their faith, hiding their true nature, perhaps even from themselves, or maybe they never joined themselves to the church despite their profession of faith or their personal assumption about

their salvation.

Think of the many nominal Christians in the West today who claim to be Christians but whose lives reflect anything but Christianity.

Or, think of the countless people who are part of a church or a religious system that plainly does not believe in the true Christ or the true gospel.

Many of them will claim allegiance to Jesus. Yeah, he's our guy. And if asked, they would certainly say they are going to heaven when they die. But they've never known or they possibly outright deny the true way of salvation.

I suppose we all know people who fit this category. They claim Jesus as their Savior. They identify themselves as Christians. They assume they will be in heaven one day.

[28 : 31] But for some there is hardly anything in their lives that reflects conformity to Christ or any evidence of salvation. And for others, they will insist, despite their claim that Jesus is the Savior, that they will enter heaven because of their good works.

Or because they're a good person. Or because they made that profession of faith 20 years ago. Or because they take weekly communion. Or because they were baptized at some point.

Well, without the new birth, without genuine conversion, they have deceived themselves in vain with false hopes and fleshly presumptions that they have God's favor and salvation.

And I think we see the most chilling example of this in Matthew chapter 7. Listen to what Jesus says in verses 21 through 23.

Matthew 7. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

[29 : 43] On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

Evidently, these are not temporary believers. Even at the end, they are saying, Lord, Lord. They are emphatically declaring their belief that Jesus is Lord, and yet there's something amiss here.

So they prophesied in his name, they cast out demons in his name, they did many mighty works in his name, but notice what Jesus says. Despite their religious activity in his name, despite their profession, they don't sincerely believe Jesus is Lord.

How do we know? Jesus says, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father.

In other words, they claim Jesus is Lord, Lord, but they did not submit to him as Lord. If they had, they would have followed his commandments.

[31 : 04] They would have done the Father's will, but they didn't. will have fooled many other believers because of their words and their religious activities and may have fooled even themselves, they could not fool Christ, which is why he utters what I think are the most terrifying words in scripture.

I never knew you. So these people have deceived themselves with false hopes and fleshly presumptions.

In other words, they have a form of hope, but it's meaningless. It's a false hope. The sense of assurance is not grounded in salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

It is not merited by what the scriptures teach. They only presume to have God's favor and salvation, and it is a fleshly or carnal presumption because it does not come from the spirit.

It is not, as the second paragraph says, assurance of faith founded on the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the gospel. It is not built on the inward evidence of those graces of the spirit about which promises are made, and it is not based on the testimony of the spirit of adoption, witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God.

[32 : 41] And the fruit of this false assurance is not humble and holy hearts. It is proud and unholy because it effectively says, I do have God's favor, I am saved, I will be in heaven, because I was baptized, or I made a profession, or I'm a good person, or I call myself a Christian.

Yes, but do you depend entirely upon the blood and righteousness of Christ for your salvation?

Have you humbled yourself before him in repentance and faith and said, Lord, save me because I cannot save myself?

Do you love him? Do you love his word? Do you love his people? Are you showing forth the evidence of the spirit's graces in your life? Has the spirit of adoption testified to you that you are a

child of God?

If not, your assurance of salvation may be a false hope and a fleshly presumption God? Now, I'll give you one more example from the Bible, perhaps the most notable one, Judas Iscariot.

Just think about this man. He had a seemingly intimate relationship with Christ for the better part of three years.

[34 : 15] He was numbered among the disciples. He heard the teachings of Christ in person, both those teachings addressed to the public as well as those meant for the disciples alone. He saw the miracles.

He participated outwardly anyway in their shared ministry, yet he had no saving union with Christ. And this is evident not only by his betrayal, but the fact that Jesus said of him, did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil? And later he said it would have been better for this man had he not been born.

Yet, as for the other disciples, they couldn't imagine that he didn't belong to their group. Even after Jesus indicated that Judas would be the one to betray him, the other disciples, they're looking around the room wondering, is it me, Lord?

Is it me? Will I be the one who betrays you? You see, Judas shows us that proximity to holy things is not the same thing as holiness.

[35 : 28] Nearness to the means of grace is not the same thing as having received God's grace. A person can participate in religious things, offer the occasional prayer, maybe join in Christian fellowship, hear sermons, even preach sermons, and yet remain a stranger to the inward saving work of God.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

Now, in my experience, when I have addressed the reality of false Christians in the past, inevitably, there will be, no doubt, very sincere Christians who begin to doubt themselves.

Like the disciples, when Jesus announced that one of them would betray him, they begin to wonder, could it be me? Could I be a false Christian? God, can I make it a false statement?

I really need to stop right here. But please remember that this is only the first sentence in the chapter. As scary as this concession may sound, though necessary, this study is far from over.

[36 : 55] Once again, I will remind you that assurance is possible. More than that, assurance is good. The Lord wants us to have this assurance. Can we know that we are saved?

The answer is yes. Yes, it is. How can we know that we are saved? Well, we'll come to that. For now, let's pray.

Father, we thank you. We thank you even for the warnings of your word. Thank you that you love sinners enough to expose false hopes and empty professions.

We pray that you would keep us from self-deception. Grant us honest hearts that are willing to examine ourselves in the light of your truth. At the same time, guard your people from unnecessary fear and doubt.

Help us to look away from ourselves and to Christ, whose blood and righteousness are the only ground of our salvation. Give us grace to persevere in the faith, to bear fruit worthy of repentance and to walk closely with our Savior.

[38 : 08] And as we continue this study in the weeks ahead, teach us what it means to have a true and biblical assurance of salvation. May our confidence ultimately not rest in ourselves but in your promises and in the finished work of Christ.

And it's in his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.