

The First Ground of Assurance: Christ Revealed in the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Well, today, as we continue our study of the doctrine of assurance as it's presented in the 18th chapter of the 1689 Baptist Confession, well, we've already made our way through the first paragraph which shows us, first of all, that assurance doesn't belong to temporary believers or other unregenerate people.

Now, they may deceive themselves into believing they have assurance, but ultimately that false hope will fail. And second, the first paragraph shows us that assurance is possible for genuine believers.

We're told, 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.

Furthermore, we're told, they may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, and this hope will never make them ashamed. Concerning that last line, I like the way the Apostle John expresses this at the end of 1 John chapter 2.

He writes, And now little children abide in Him, in Christ that is, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink from Him in shame at His coming.

[1 : 26] Those who truly believe and love the Lord sincerely will be able to stand confidently when He returns and not shrink from Him in shame. With that, let's move on to the second paragraph.

It's on the wall behind me, and it says, This certainty is not merely an inconclusive or likely persuasion based on a fallible hope.

It is an infallible assurance of faith founded on the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the gospel. It is also built on the inward evidence of those graces of the Spirit about which promises are made.

It is further based on the testimony of the Spirit of adoption, witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God. As a fruit of this assurance, our hearts are kept both humble and holy.

So, now that the confession has shown us that assurance is possible, it then explains how our assurance can be certain. And it does so by giving us three grounds for this assurance.

[2 : 36] First, our assurance is founded on the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the gospel. Second, it is built on the inward evidence of those graces of the Spirit about which promises are made.

And third, it is based on the testimony of the Spirit of adoption, witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God. Today, we will consider just the first ground, which is the blood and righteousness of Christ.

First, though, let's look at that first sentence in the paragraph. This certainty is not merely an inconclusive or likely persuasion based on a fallible hope.

So, paragraph two begins by denying two inadequate forms of confidence. Assurance is not, number one, inconclusive, and number two, a likely persuasion.

In other words, it is not a mere guess. It is not the believer saying, I guess I am saved, or I hope it turns out well, or I think I am probably saved.

[3 : 45] An assurance is also not likely persuasion based on a fallible hope. What does that mean? Well, let me share with you a question someone sent me earlier this week after hearing last week's lesson.

This is someone I don't know. They sent this message online, but they asked, That's a fair question.

And here is my answer to them. The same God who promises salvation to those who persevere also promises to preserve them to the end.

We are not assured because we have already finished the race, but because Christ has promised to finish what he started, Philippians 1.6. As Paul said, I know whom I have believed, 2 Timothy 1.12.

Not merely, I know what I will do tomorrow. You see, that's the difference between what the confession describes as fallible hope versus infallible hope.

[4 : 57] Persuasion based on fallible hope is really dependent upon human changeableness. It's basically someone calculating their spiritual odds.

They're looking inward at their own Christian performance, perhaps. And though they may have assurance of their salvation in this moment, they're also thinking in the back of their minds, I may not have the same hope tomorrow.

So what's the flip side of that? What is infallible hope? Well, it doesn't mean the believer is personally infallible. It doesn't mean his introspection or his self-examination is infallible.

His self-assessment may be too severe one moment. It may be too generous the next. His feelings will rise and fall. His faith may be weak or strong at any given moment.

It's not the believer who is infallible, but it's the hope that is infallible. And what makes this hope infallible?

[6 : 02] That is, what makes this hope unfailing? Well, the short answer is God. As I told this gentleman online, we are not assured because we already have finished the race or that we have that much confidence in ourselves, but because Christ has promised to finish what he started.

You see, the blood of Christ is sure. The righteousness of Christ is sure. The promise of God is sure. This certainty of assurance can exist only because God is true, because Christ is sufficient, because the gospel promise is firm.

This is why the confession cites Hebrews 6. Starting at verse 13 in Hebrews 6, listen to what it says. For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, Surely I will bless you and multiply you.

And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes, an oath is final for confirmation.

[7 : 20] So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath. So that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

So here we're told that God made a promise, and then he went even further by making an oath. And both are positively unchangeable because they are based on the character of God himself, who we're told cannot lie.

He cannot revoke his promise, and he cannot break his oath. His very nature won't allow it. And because of this, the author says, we have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf.

So notice how that hope is not defined as a feeling, or something we find within ourselves.

[8 : 47] It's presented here as an objective reality outside of ourselves. God made the promise to save. He made the oath.

Jesus died, and he rose again. He ripped the veil of the temple in two. He gave his people entrance into the presence of God the Father. And because of this objective reality, the author says we have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.

Now just think about that imagery for a moment. Our hope is to be an anchor for the soul. So think about the boat that's drifting on the water, wherever the wind and the waves happen to send it.

The purpose of an anchor then is to keep the boat fixed in one spot. Now the way many people think about hope would be the equivalent of taking that anchor and throwing it into the middle of the boat.

People often think of hope as, how do I feel about my salvation right now? Or do I feel like I would go to heaven if I were to die right here, right now?

[9 : 57] Well, that's not exactly biblical hope. Yes, there's a place for self-examination, and we'll come to that, but an anchor doesn't do any good if it's inside the boat. No, the anchor only functions by being fixed outside of the boat.

It needs to be outside of the boat so it can latch onto some solid ground beneath the water. And of course, that solid ground is the promise of God fulfilled in Christ. In short, true assurance is not really a guessing game.

It's not wishful thinking. Ultimately, it's trusting in the promises of God, which leads us to the first ground of assurance according to the confession.

Again, it says, it is an infallible assurance of faith founded on the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the gospel. Again, there are two other grounds of assurance mentioned in this paragraph, but I think the authors start with this one very intentionally.

Why? It's objective. It's the anchor. It's outside of the believer's subjective experience. I mean, the blood of Jesus does not fluctuate with the believer's mood, does it?

[11 : 15] His righteousness does not become more complete when a believer feels strong or perhaps less complete on days when he feels weak.

No, no matter how we feel or what we go through, Christ has died. Christ has obeyed. Christ has risen. Christ has ascended.

Christ intercedes for us. Christ saves those who come to God through him. These are all absolute realities before they are the personal inward experiences of those he saves.

Think of the way Paul defines the gospel at the start of 1 Corinthians 15. He writes, Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

For I deliver to you, as of first importance, what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

[12 : 30] So, the gospel that saves is what? The objective historical reality that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and was raised in fulfillment of Old Testament Scriptures.

And we really see the same thing in Romans chapter 5, in verses 6 through 10. Paul writes, So, it's the age-old question, which came first, the chicken or the egg?

While the confession does address inward evidences of salvation, we shouldn't begin there. If the believer begins with himself or herself, he will find many reasons to tremble.

He'll see his remaining sin. He'll see his mixed motives. He'll see very cold affection at times. He'll see inconsistency. He will often see unbelief, and pride, and selfishness, and cowardice, and dullness in prayer, and distraction when we worship, and imperfection in our obedience.

And that's certainly not an infallible hope. But if assurance begins with the objective reality that Christ died for us, well, now we have solid ground for our anchor to latch onto.

[14 : 32] So, we don't want to discount inner evidence altogether. They are important, but we have to put them in their proper place. The root produces fruit. And fruit confirms the life of the root, but the fruit is not the root.

For example, good works are evidence of a true and living faith, but they are not the righteousness by which we stand before God. Christ alone is our righteousness.

Paul says, Christ Jesus became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, so that, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 1.30. So, when considering how we might have assurance of our salvation, we begin with Christ, as the confession really directs us to do.

Now, what does the confession mean by the blood of Christ? Well, it's referring to His sacrificial death, of course. It's referring to His atonement, His substitution.

[15 : 42] It means that Christ bore the curse of the law for His people. It means that He satisfied divine justice on the cross.

It means that He secured forgiveness for sinners by His death. In chapter 8 of the confession, paragraph 4, we read, the Lord Jesus most willingly experienced the punishment that we deserved and that we should have endured and suffered.

He was made sin and a curse for us. He endured extremely heavy sorrows in His soul and extremely painful sufferings in His body. He was crucified and died and remained in a state of death, yet His body did not decay.

On the third day, He arose from the dead with the same body in which He suffered. From beginning to end, the Bible teaches that sin brings guilt before a holy God and that guilt requires atonement. In Genesis 2:17, God warned Adam that disobedience would bring death. Then in Genesis 3, Adam sinned, of course, and shame entered the picture, guilt entered, death entered, and sinners hid themselves from God.

[17:04] Well, jumping ahead to Exodus 12, the blood of the Passover lamb, you'll remember, marked the houses of Israel so that judgment would pass over them. In Leviticus 17:11, the Lord says, for the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

And I know I'm skipping over a whole lot in the Old Testament, but when we come to Isaiah 53, we're shown how the Savior who would come would be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and would bear the sins of many.

Of course, the whole of the Old Testament is preparing us for the cross, for the death of Christ. It's preparing us for Jesus' death who would make atonement for our sins.

When we come to the New Testament and John the Baptist sees Jesus approaching, what does he say? Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

What is John saying there? Well, he's gathering up all of those elements of the Old Testament sacrificial system and all of those allusions to a final, permanent atonement, and he's combining them into this one title for Christ, the Lamb of God.

[18:33] He is the true and final Passover Lamb. Paul says it very explicitly when he writes, for Christ, our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed.

Peter says, you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

And the Apostle John writes, if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

Now perhaps Romans chapter 3 is the clearest of all. In verses 23 through 26, listen to what he writes. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

[20:02] So clearly, God is not issuing pardons to sinners based on sentimentality, you might say. He's not overlooking anyone's sins. No, God is a just God so he must carry out justice.

He must punish our sins and the good news of the gospel is that Christ died in our place. Justice has not been merely bypassed, it's actually been satisfied.

The debt wasn't ignored, the debt was paid in full. According to Hebrews 9, when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

For if the blood of goats and bulls, the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more would the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

He goes on to write, Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

[21:41] And Hebrews 10, 14 adds this, For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. For all time, that is forever.

So the death of Jesus was not a sacrifice that temporarily appeased God. It's not a partial atonement. It doesn't need to be repeated over and over again because it's somehow insufficient. No, when Jesus said, It is finished, he meant it. Once and for all, it's done. So when the conscience says, You have sinned against God, we don't respond to that charge by denying it.

We don't reply by saying to ourselves, Well, maybe so. Maybe I'm guilty, but my sins aren't that serious. And we don't answer, Yes, my, my, I know I'm a sinner, but my future obedience, my future good works, they'll compensate for it.

They'll balance out in the end. No, the best, and really only response is Christ has died. He made atonement by his blood, becoming the justifier of the one who has faith in him.

[23 : 00] Now, the confession goes on to point to the righteousness of Christ as well, not just his blood or his death, and that's because in addition to the pardon we need, we also need positive righteousness before God.

Well, the problem is that the sinner doesn't have his own righteousness. Isaiah 64, 6 says, We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment or filthy rags, as the King James Version says.

In Philippians chapter 3, Paul essentially renounces any confidence he might have in his own righteousness. Here's what he says, Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I might gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Obviously, Paul points to it there, but if a sinner is to stand before God, he will need the righteousness of Christ. Why his righteousness?

[24 : 25] Because only Christ was able to fully and perfectly be obedient to the law of God. According to Galatians 4, he was born under the law to redeem those under the law.

You may remember at his baptism, when John the Baptist essentially asked why he needed to be baptized, he said it was to fulfill all righteousness. When he went out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for 40 days, we see him obeying where both Adam and later Israel failed. Throughout his entire life, he loved the Father with all of his heart, all of his soul, all of his mind, all of his strength. He also loved his neighbor perfectly. Hebrews 4.15 says, he was tempted in all points, just as we are.

Yet he did not sin, not once. He obeyed the will of his Father all the way through his death on the cross. And that is precisely why God could accept his sacrifice.

If he had been guilty himself, he would have had his own sins to pay for, so he could never have paid for ours. But he was perfectly innocent. He was altogether righteous.

[25 : 42] And because he was, God did accept his atonement, the atonement he made on our behalf. And more to the point, he accepts those who are united to Christ by faith.

2 Corinthians 5.21, for our sake, he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

God. So you see, if God accepts the sinner, it's not because of the sinner's righteousness. It's not because of his good works.

It's not because of the intensity of his repentance or the warmth of his affections. No, the sinner is accepted for Christ's sake. Listen to what Paul says in Romans chapter 4, starting at verse 5.

To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

[26 : 51] Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. So to be clear, this is not a situation where the sinner's righteousness, you know, carries him so far but we still need Christ's righteousness to take us the rest of the way.

And it's not a situation where Christ gives his righteousness to us in such a way that we become perfectly obedient just as he was and that's why God accepts us.

That's not it either. No, this is why we refer to this transaction between Christ and believers as imputation. Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer which means God legally credits Christ's perfect obedience and righteousness to the believer's account.

And this transaction takes place through faith which is why Paul says his faith is counted as righteousness. The sinner comes to Christ empty-handed by faith and the righteousness of Christ is credited to his account.

And that's why you'll notice that this infallible assurance is, according to the confession, of faith. It's faith that connects our personal experience to this objective reality of the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the gospel.

[28 : 25] That's why Paul in Romans 3 says, we are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward to be a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

Now, what about that phrase revealed in the gospel? I think we all know that the life and death of Christ are revealed in the gospel, but why do you suppose the authors of the confession felt the need to include this phrase?

Well, they are making it clear that personal assurance is not founded on some sort of hidden knowledge. We don't need to receive some private prophecy in order to have real confidence in our salvation.

This is really an allusion to what the next paragraph clarifies when it says believers may attain this assurance without any extraordinary revelation.

You don't have to be an apostle. You don't have to be some level of elite Christian in order to know you are saved. The first, the most important, the objective ground of our assurance, that is the blood and righteousness of Christ is revealed plainly to all in the gospel.

[29 : 52] This is why Romans chapter 1 says, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed, faith from faith for faith, as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

in 2 Timothy 3.15, Paul says, The sacred writings, the scriptures, are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

As John nears the end of his account of the gospel, he says in verse, chapter 20, verse 31, These are written, things about Jesus, that is, 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.

It's all revealed. Now back in Deuteronomy 29, we are told the secret things belong to the Lord our God. There are things that God does not reveal to us.

However, the verse goes on to say, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever. And according to the New Testament, the salvation and the hope offered and secured by Christ are among, better yet, are at the very heart of those revealed things.

[31 : 25] If we were to step back in Baptist history into the middle of the 18th century in England, we would find many Baptists who would suggest that the gospel was essentially a secret or hidden thing.

they said that it's not for everyone and really should be reserved for the elect of God only. Well, there's some truth to that.

However, there's a bit of a problem because we don't necessarily know who the elect are. We're not privy to the names written in the Lamb's Book of Life. The elect do not have a big E stamped on their forehead as convenient as that might be.

So, the response of these Baptists was to say, well, we wait until we see some evidence that they are elect and then we'll give them the gospel. You can probably see that's a little backward.

They basically treat a secret thing of God, knowing who the elect are, as a revealed thing and a revealed thing, the invitation of the gospel, as a secret thing. Well, that's not how the Bible presents it.

[32 : 32] Instead, the Bible shows how the gospel is very much a revealed thing and should be preached openly and as widely as possible. In Acts 17.30, God commands all people everywhere to repent.

In Acts 13, Paul preaches very indiscriminately, saying, let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man, Jesus, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

In John 6, Jesus himself says, whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. And again, what does John say at the end of his first epistle?

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know you have eternal life. So, neither the gospel itself nor the assurance that can be gained from it is a hidden thing.

It's not supposed to be. John doesn't say, these things have I hidden from you until you receive a private revelation. No, he says, I write these things that you may know that you have eternal life. [33 : 59] So, we see how revelation serves assurance. So, that's the first ground of assurance. I'll read it again from the confession.

This certainty is an infallible assurance of faith founded on the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the gospel. And if we think about this first ground of assurance carefully, we realize that it protects against a couple of potential problems or at least one potential problem and that is what I'll call introspective legalism.

That's my term for it. I don't know if anyone else has ever called it that. So, when we're thinking about assurance, it seems only natural to ask ourselves questions like, have I done enough? Have I obeyed well enough? Have I repented enough? Have I mourned over my sin enough? Have I loved enough? Is my faith strong enough? And so on. Well, we can address those questions. In fact, I will address those questions. But those are not the first questions we should ask ourselves. Let me give you a better list of questions. First, let's ask questions like this.

[35 : 12] What has Christ done? has Christ obeyed? Has Christ died in my place? Has Christ risen again?

Has Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary? Is Christ interceding for me? Has Christ promised to receive those who come to Him in faith?

Has Christ satisfied divine justice? Has Christ accomplished perfect righteousness? Has Christ been accepted by the Father?

Has Christ been given as mediator and priest and king and savior? As we discussed last time, our faith, our love, our obedience, these things matter.

But first and foremost, we should go back to the foundation of salvation itself. we need to keep things in order. It is Christ who saves.

[36 : 18] The evidence in our lives will confirm it. Spiritual fruit will support our assurance, but Christ is the first and objective ground of our assurance. Now, the confession here also protects against a form of presumption.

You see, if the confession left it here, with just this first ground of assurance, someone might object and say, well, if assurance rests only on Christ, won't that make people careless about their sanctification, their holiness, the fruit in their lives of this assurance and salvation?

Well, it very well might. It shouldn't, but it might. But of course, that's not the end of this chapter, as we will come to the rest of it soon enough. But in conclusion, let me make a handful of brief applications.

First, before we ask ourselves, do I feel saved? Instead, let's ask ourselves, what has God revealed in the gospel concerning Christ?

As we all know, our emotions can be very unstable, but Christ, he remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. second, before we ask ourselves, do I see enough grace in my life?

[37 : 41] We should ask, am I receiving and am I resting upon Christ? We shouldn't search for signs of life while simultaneously turning away from the life-giving Savior.

Third, before we ask, was my conversion experience clear enough? we should ask, do I now believe in Christ? Memories of our conversion may encourage us, but they're no substitute for present, ongoing faith, trusting in Him day by day.

Fourth, before we ask, have I done enough? We should ask, has Christ done enough? That's the central question.

And the gospel's answer is, yes, it is finished. Fifth, I'll say again, self-examination is good, but never do so without also looking to Christ.

Self-examination detached from Christ will quickly become either pride, look how well I'm doing, or despair, look how much I'm failing.

[38 : 58] Look to Christ. Sixth, the answer to any accusations you feel within, maybe when the conscience says you're guilty, or you've not obeyed perfectly, or Satan whispers you will be condemned.

The answer, surprise, surprise, is always Christ. It's not, I was converted on this date in history. I wrote it in my Bible, look.

Or, I've been a Christian for 20 years. No, the answer is found in what the gospel reveals such as this. If God is 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? 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.

[40 : 10] Last but not least, we do not want to separate what God has joined together. Christ is the foundation. Graces are evidence. The Spirit is a witness.

But if the first ground is denied, assurance can very quickly turn legalistic. If the second ground is denied, assurance becomes presumptuous and it's detached from holiness or any fruit of eternal life in our lives.

If the third ground is denied, assurance becomes, I guess, purely rationalistic and it neglects the living work of the Spirit in our lives.

But if we keep them in order and we hold these things together, then we can have the kind of assurance the confession is teaching us about.

With that, let's pray. Father, we thank you that our hope does not rest upon our fleeting feelings or our ability to sustain that assurance.

[41 : 14] We thank you that our assurance is founded upon something far more solid, the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ as it's revealed in the Gospel. Keep us, Lord, from both presumption and despair.

Help us to walk humbly And to rest confidently in the Savior who has done enough, who is enough, and who will never fail those who come to Him by faith.

We ask these things in His precious name. Amen.