

# The Second Ground of Assurance: The Inward Evidences of Grace

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, once again, we are studying the doctrine of assurance according to the 18th chapter of the 1689 Baptist Confession. Can we know we are saved? How do we know we are saved?

! Well, we've looked at the first paragraph of the chapter which answers the first question, and the answer is yes, we can know we are saved. We have numerous examples of individuals in the Bible who express their clear confidence that they are, in fact, saved. Better yet, they express their confidence that they will be saved in the end. And if we're still hanging on to that thought that maybe they only knew because they were apostles or somehow extraordinarily enlightened believers, given insight by God that the rest of us are not typically given, well, we have that wonderful verse near the end of 1 John, which I've come back to again and again, and I'll come back to again and again. This is where John tells the Christians to whom he is writing, 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.

Yes, we can know, and the Apostle John clearly wants us to know. He wants us to have that confidence. That's the primary reason he writes his first epistle. As for the second question, how do we know we are saved? Well, that's what we began looking at last time. So we return again to the second paragraph of the chapter, and I'll read it again in full. 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 as I've said, the confession provides us with three grounds of assurance. We see them all here in this paragraph. Number one, we have the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the gospel. Number two, we have the inward evidence of those graces of the Spirit about which promises are made. And number three, we have the testimony of the

Spirit of adoption. Of course, we looked at the first of these last time, and I described it as the one objective ground of our assurance. What makes it objective? Well, no matter our personal experiences or feelings or anything else that might be labeled subjective, Christ lived a sinless life. He died.

He made propitiation for our sins. He rose again from the dead. God the Father accepted His sacrifice on behalf of His elect people. That is all historical reality, of course. Our personal experience doesn't change any of that. And that's why Hebrews chapter 6 can say we have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. However, if you're thinking critically about that, you might think to ask, well, how does that help my personal assurance? Sure, Jesus died for sinners, but am I one of them?

[ 3 : 36 ] Well, notice again what the confession says. It is an infallible assurance of faith. What joins the sinner to the historical reality of Christ's death and resurrection? What joins us to Christ Himself so that God accepts us for His Son's sake? Well, it's faith. I read this last time, but in Romans chapter 3, Paul writes, we 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.

So, it is our faith that makes the objective historical reality of Christ's blood and righteousness a subjective, personal experience for us. It unites the two together. And I think the Puritans had an excellent way of demonstrating this through syllogism. So, let me give you an example of what I mean by syllogism. The idea is that we take one major proposition, which everyone would agree is

true, and we follow that up with a, let's say, a minor proposition, and together they lead us to a logical conclusion. For example, I might say, all human beings are sinners. Is that a true statement? Okay, here's my second proposition. I am a human being. So, what conclusion can we draw from these two statements together? Well, the conclusion is, I must be a sinner. If all humans are sinners, and I am a human, then I must be a sinner. So, listen to how Thomas Brooks employed this kind of syllogism. He writes,

Now, although it must be granted that the major of this proposition is scripture, yet the assumption is from experience, and therefore, a godly man, being assisted therein by the Holy Ghost, may safely draw the conclusion as undeniable. So, using that same concept, we might say our first proposition is, whoever believes shall be saved. And that is clearly biblical. Jesus said, whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. Paul said, believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.

Well, here's our second proposition. I believe. So, what conclusion do we reach when we put these two propositions together? If everyone who believes shall be saved, and I believe, then what? I shall be saved.

John Owen actually used this precise syllogism. Here's what he wrote, and I've updated the English ever so slightly. All believers may have assurance that Christ died for them with the intention and purpose of saving their souls. For example, every believer may reason as follows. Major premise, Christ died for all believers. That is, all who choose him and rest upon him as an all-sufficient Savior. This proposition is plainly taught throughout scripture in countless places. Minor premise, I believe in Christ. I choose him as my Savior, cast myself entirely upon him for salvation, and give myself up to him to receive mercy in his appointed way. The truth of this proposition in the believer's heart is confirmed by the witness of the Spirit, and scripture itself provides many testimonies to its certainty. Therefore, the conclusion follows. Christ died for me in particular with the intention and purpose of saving me. This is a conclusion that all believers, and only believers, can rightly draw. It belongs to them alone, and this treasure of consolation is intended for them alone. Now, he goes on to write, at the same time, the sufficiency of Christ's death to save every person who comes to him is more than enough to support all the invitations and appeals of the gospel. Sinners are urged to believe, and when by Christ's grace they do believe, embracing the promise, then this infallible assurance of Christ's intention and purpose to redeem them by his death is made known to them. [ 8 : 40 ] So, by faith, historical reality is made personal. The objective is made subjective, if you will, and the reason I spent so much time last week imploring us to look to Christ rather than ourselves is that he is the object of our faith.

What good does it do to say, you know, I believe, if we've lost sight of the first proposition, apart from Christ, apart from his blood and righteousness, there is no salvation.

So, there can be no assurance of salvation. As the author of Hebrews reminds us, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

As we'll see in the next paragraph of the confession, our faith is not always accompanied by assurance. And the final paragraph says, true believers may in various ways have the assurance of their salvation shaken, decreased, or temporarily lost.

So, when that happens, the best thing we can do is go back to the gospel, back to the cross, back to the Lord's resurrection, back to all of those promises of God given to all who believe.

[ 9 : 58 ] Look to Christ as you run the race. After all, he is the founder and perfecter of our faith. So, looking again at these three grounds of assurance, we might think of them in this way.

I previously categorized the first as objective and the others as subjective, but as I've said, there is a subjective sense to the first, because the blood and righteousness of Christ can be a ground of assurance only to the sincere believer.

So, it might help to think of them in slightly different terms, and let me show you. First, we might think of the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the gospel in terms of our justification.

What is justification? It's God's legal declaration that a sinner is righteous in his sight because of the imputed righteousness of Christ received by faith alone.

Second, we might think of the inward evidence of those graces of the Spirit in terms of our sanctification. Sanctification, of course, is the ongoing work of God's grace in the believer's life, by which we are renewed in the whole person.

[ 11 : 22 ] After the image of Christ and increasingly die to sin and live under righteousness, and let me emphasize that word, ongoing. It is progressive throughout the Christian life.

We are progressively made holy as we are increasingly conformed to the image of Christ. And third, we might think of the testimony of the Spirit of adoption in terms of the Spirit's indwelling.

That is, the Spirit's permanent presence within every believer, uniting us to Christ and empowering faith and holiness and assurance and prayer and obedience and so on.

To be clear, the Spirit does not merely influence us from the outside, but actually lives within the believer as we are described in Scripture as God's temple.

So we might ask ourselves a series of three simple questions. Do I believe? Am I growing in God's grace?

[ 12 : 28 ] What is the Spirit showing me? With that, let's move on to the second ground of assurance. The confession says, assurance is also built on the inward evidence of those graces of the Spirit about which promises are made.

First of all, notice the word also. When the confession, in fact, I'll pull back, go back to that. When the confession lists these grounds of assurance, it is not either or, it's also.

If the first ground has to do with our justification and the second ground has to do with our sanctification, the point here is that the same God who justifies also sanctifies.

It is never one without the other. So as we're striving for assurance, we not only ask ourselves, do I believe, do I trust in Christ wholly for salvation, but also, have I experienced the sanctification that follows my justification?

Second, notice the word inward. The confession points us to the inward evidence of the Spirit's graces.

[ 13 : 47 ] Why do you think that is? When most of us think about sanctification, perhaps we think about external changes. You know, I read my Bible more, I pray more, I was baptized, I do these various good works.

But think back to what the confession says in the first paragraph of this chapter. The very first sentence says, Temporary believers and other unregenerate men may deceive themselves in vain with false hopes.

One of the examples I gave before was Judas Iscariot. Who evidently did enough things right that Jesus' other disciples could not believe he was the one who would betray him.

Even after Jesus made it obvious that it was going to be Judas, they still looked at themselves saying, Is it me? Could I be the one to betray Jesus? So evidently Judas made a pretty convincing Christian on the outside.

Of course, the internal work of God in our hearts will produce external evidence. Jesus said, you will recognize them by their fruits.

[ 14 : 59 ] But that's not where the authors of the confession would have us begin. Instead, they point to the work of the Spirit in our souls. It points to regeneration.

It points to a new heart. Faith. Repentance. A love for God. A hatred of sin. A hunger for the things of God. Why look inward?

Well, because as we've learned from Judas and other examples in the Bible, there are unregenerate people who go through the motions of religion without a genuinely changed heart.

Next, notice the word evidence. The confession does not say that these graces cause our salvation or merit it or somehow replace the gracious work of God.

It calls them evidence. We might think of them as witnesses. Or perhaps we could use the illustration of a fire. When a fire is burning, we certainly feel the heat. We feel the warmth that it produces.

[ 16 : 05 ] And that warmth is evidence that a fire is burning. But the warmth does not cause the fire to burn. In the same way, the graces of the Spirit are evidence of the Spirit doing a saving work in us.

We feel the warmth from the Spirit's fire. And lastly, notice that these graces are about which promises are made.

What does that mean? Well, let's think about some of the promises given in the Bible. John 3.36, for example, says, Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.

So if you have the grace of faith, the Lord promises you eternal life. If you possess the grace of repentance, God promises that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins.

That's 1 John 1.9. If you love the church, God says, We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. That's 1 John 3.14.

[17:19] Do you see what these promises do? They support our assurance. When we see the Spirit at work in us through these various inward graces, and we look back to the promises of God, we can say, Oh, that promise is for me.

That applies to me personally. Remember what John says near the end of his first epistle. God desires for us to have assurance of our salvation.

He wants us to see the evidence of it. In fact, He goes as far as to command us to pursue this assurance. Hebrews 6.11, We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness, to have the full assurance of hope until the end.

So to those whom assurance belongs, evidence can be found. And when that evidence is there, and we're looking to the promises of God, then we find the comfort that God intends for His people. Now, if you will, turn over to 1 John. I know I keep coming back to this epistle, but I do so for good reason.

[18:37] Again, John writes this book to help believers, essentially to distinguish genuine Christianity from false professions so that we can enjoy confident assurance of eternal life.

And it seems that every time I come back to this book, I see more and more to be gleaned from it. Throughout this letter, John, he gives us a series of marks, or tests, if you will, by which a believer can examine himself.

And these marks, well, they're sharp enough to expose a false believer, but they're also gracious enough to comfort a true believer. So I want to look at five of them.

Now, technically, I mentioned three of them in a previous lesson, but I believe they're worth repeating. And I'll put them up on the wall behind me.

So the first mark is what we confess about Christ. True believers confess the true Christ. In 1 John, chapter 2, verse 23, John writes, No one who denies the Son has the Father.

[19:51] Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Then in chapter 5, verse 1, he says, Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

Now, we might think that this one is a given, right? Of course, a true believer will confess the true Christ. After all, there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

Jesus himself said, No one comes to the Father except through me. However, we should keep in mind that there are countless people in this world who profess to believe in Jesus, but they don't believe in the true Jesus.

Mormons, for example, they affirm Jesus as Savior, but they teach that he is a created being. The spirit child of the Heavenly Father, not to mention a brother of Lucifer.

Well, that's a far cry from what the Word of God says. The Bible says Jesus is the eternal, uncreated Son of God, begotten, not made.

[21:10] Then there are the Jehovah's Witnesses who identify Jesus with Michael the archangel and deny that he is fully God. Well, the Bible teaches that Jesus is eternally divine and shares the same divine nature with the Father.

Then we have Islam, which reveres Jesus as a prophet, but deny that he is the Son of God. They also deny his crucifixion.

They reject his deity. And then we've seen all kinds of what we might call liberal Christians speaking very highly of Jesus as a moral teacher, as a social reformer.

But they deny his miracles. They deny his virgin birth. They deny his bodily resurrection, his deity, his substitutionary atonement. Well, that is not the same Jesus at all.

Paul spoke of those who proclaim another Jesus than the one we proclaimed. These various groups may say they believe in Jesus, but we have to ask, which Jesus are we talking about?

[22:26] Well, if only the true Christ can give us salvation, then it stands to reason that we cannot find assurance of salvation apart from faith in the true Christ.

Well, the second mark, according to John, is obedience. In 1 John 2, verses 3 and 4, he says, And by this we know that we have come to know him if we keep his commandments.

Whoever says, I know him, but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. Now, this one might seem like a strange one to include at this point because aren't we talking about the very personal, inward evidence of God's grace?

Well, we are, but that's precisely where we should begin evaluating our obedience. Think back to Matthew 7. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, starting at verse 21.

He 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 who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?

[ 23 : 42 ] Did we not cast out demons in your name? Did we not do many mighty works in your name? And then I will declare to them, Jesus says, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

So Jesus is talking about people who, at the very least, appear to be obedient. They claim allegiance to Christ, they are prophesying in his name, they're casting out demons in his name, they're doing many mighty works in his name.

By all appearances, they are faithfully following Christ. But that's only what you see on the outside. And I think verse 21 is key.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father. Evidently, despite all appearances, these men were not obedient.

They were not doing the will of the Father. We might say that what was going on on the outside did not at all match what was going on on the inside. And the same was true for many of the Jews, especially the Pharisees, of whom Jesus said, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

[ 25 : 05 ] Obviously, we want to be externally obedient to the will of God. But that obedience begins internally, in the heart and mind. Does our sin grieve us?

Do we hate what the Lord hates? Do we love what the Lord loves? Are we trusting in His way that it is right? Does our heart have a posture of repentance?

Do we feel conviction over sin? Do we feel a longing to follow after Christ in His ways? Well, John's third mark, and perhaps the clearest in the whole letter, is love for one's brothers and sisters in Christ.

He says in 1 John 3, 14, we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

Then in chapter 4, verses 7 and 8, he writes, Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

[ 26 : 14 ] Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. Then down in verse 20, he says, If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar.

Now, I think we can safely assume this love for one another is more than simply enjoying the company of people who share a common interest, maybe a similar temperament.

it shows itself not only in fellowship but in service, in sacrifice, in forgiveness, in patience, in prayer. We love Christ so it naturally follows that we would love his body, his people. Now, that's not to say we can't have strains in our relationships, but there will be a strong desire for unity and a willingness to bear with one another.

So, I previously mentioned those first three marks from 1 John, but I want to add two more. The fourth mark is the believer's relationship to the world.

[ 27 : 28 ] In 1 John 2.15, John writes, Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Now, I suppose we could lump this in with obedience, but I think it can stand on its own. John doesn't merely talk about following the pattern of this world, but he speaks of love for this world, which could be love for its values, for its priorities, or it could be clinging to what's temporal, right? We might ask ourselves, do we think of this world as our home? Do we think of this world and the things in this world as our greatest treasure?

Obviously, a believer can be tempted by these things, but when the Spirit of God is at work in us, there will be at the very least conflict. We simply cannot be satisfied with what this world has to offer.

Now, the fifth and final mark is perseverance. John writes about those who had abandoned the church.

[ 28 : 44 ] He says in 1 John 2.19, 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 all are not of us.

clearly, John does not see this as a situation where genuine believers have lost their salvation. He says their departure reveals that they never had a saving union with Christ to begin with.

They never truly belonged to the church. And on the flip side of that, he's somewhat subtly reminding believers, hey, you're still here. you've not abandoned the faith. You haven't left the church behind. And what does that say about them? Well, it doesn't say they're perfect by any means. It doesn't say they've never had doubts. It doesn't say they've never stumbled or never will stumble. But their perseverance, their desire to trust in Christ time and time again through the doubts and through the stumbles, and their willingness to press on in the faith, show that they do belong among God's people.

[ 29 : 58 ] They do, in fact, belong to God. Now, this is not a complete list of everything the Bible would define as graces of the Spirit.

For example, 2 Peter 1 mentions faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love.

Galatians 5 says the fruit of the Spirit is joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But I've highlighted just those things found in 1 John because, again, John's express purpose for writing his letter is to give believers confidence in their salvation.

So his list may not be exhaustive, but it's a wonderfully helpful starting place as we examine the evidence of the Spirit's graces within us. Now with that, let me give you five brief suggestions as you practice this self-examination on your own.

And I do want to be clear about the fact that the Bible does call us to examine ourselves. In 2 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 5, Paul says, examine yourselves to see whether you were in the faith.

[ 31 : 17 ] test yourselves, or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? The implication is that if Jesus Christ is in you, you have been born of a Spirit, you are a true disciple, and you will pass the test.

You will see evidence of the Spirit working within you. And if you see that evidence, and you return again to the promises of God throughout the Bible, you can know that you have eternal life.

You can have what the confession calls both certainty and infallible assurance. So first of all, I'll say again that we should begin with Christ.

Do not begin by examining the quality of your faith apart from the object of your faith. Look to the Savior, rest on His blood and righteousness, and then ask whether His grace is bearing fruit in you. Second, examine yourself by Scripture, not by other Christians. I think what is sometimes called imposter syndrome sometimes affects even those of us in the church.

[ 32 : 39 ] Chances are we may feel like other Christians are better Christians than we are. Christians are in the church. And that may lead us to question whether or not we are legitimate Christians at all. But the Bible confirms that we are in various stages of growth.

There are people with stronger faith, there are people with weaker faith. And frankly, I don't see where we're called to compare ourselves. Instead, we are called to examine ourselves in light of what Scripture teaches.

Do we confess Christ? Do we trust in Him for salvation? Are we repentant? Do we love the brethren? Do we strive to obey?

Are we persevering? We examine ourselves by those marks, not by how we compare with other Christians, or at least seem to compare. Third, I would say look for direction, not perfection.

What do I mean by that? Well, are you fighting your sin? Do you repent when you stumble? Do you love Christ?

[ 33 : 49 ] Do you desire holiness? Do you return to God after sinning? It's not a question of whether we are perfect, because none of us are. The question is, what direction are we moving?

Are we moving toward conformity to Christ, no matter how far away from it we seem to be at any given moment? That's what matters. Fourth, and similar, look for sincerity, not sinlessness.

Sincere love can have fears and doubts. Sincere obedience will be full of imperfections. faith. But you see, weak faith is still faith.

Just remember the tenderness of Christ. We're told a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench. And by the way, these suggestions, especially the last two, are to really prevent us from ever thinking that self-examination is somehow a form of legalism or bondage.

As I mentioned to Pastor John earlier this week, self-examination, when it's accompanied by the promises of Scripture, that doesn't really lead to bondage. To the contrary, it leads to assurance for the sincere believer.

[ 35 : 21 ] Well, fifth and final, do not examine yourself apart from prayer. We should pray as David did in Psalm 139, verses 23 and 24.

He prayed, Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. See if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

I don't know about you, but I've thought that self-examination apart from prayer does feel a bit like bondage. It can be torture even.

I'm seeking assurance, but I also have to question myself. Can I really trust my own heart? After all, Jeremiah says the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick.

Who can understand it? But then what does Jeremiah write? Jeremiah 17, 10, I, the Lord, search the heart and test the mind.

[ 36 : 25 ] God knows us better than we know ourselves. Why wouldn't we seek his help? Remember, he wants us to have assurance.

So in summary, this part of the confession really speaks a different word to different people, to the presumptuous, to the person who rests on his profession, his attendance, his knowledge, respectability, maybe his outward activities, the confession essentially says you should not rest on those things.

What about the graces of the Spirit? Do you believe in the true Christ? Do you repent of your sin? Do you love the brothers sincerely? Do you fight against sin?

Or have you made peace with it? Do not be content to say, Lord, Lord, look at all the wonderful things I've done. while your heart remains a stranger to grace.

But to the person who's doubting, what does the confession say? Well, it says, do not despise real grace simply because it seems weak. You may sin, but do you also see repentance?

[ 37 : 45 ] You may feel that your love for Christ is so little, but do you grieve that your love for Christ is so little? You may stumble in obedience, but do you sincerely desire to obey and strive to do so?

And to the one who feels assurance of their salvation, the confession essentially says these evidences of grace should both humble and encourage you.

They humble you because not one of these graces is yours apart from the grace of Christ. That's why we call them graces. And they encourage you because they are real evidence of your salvation.

But whatever you do, don't grow careless. Your salvation cannot be lost, but your assurance certainly can. Keep walking close to Christ.

Make use of the Lord's means of grace, from the word to prayer to fellowship with the saints to the Lord's table and so on. God's love to pray.

[ 38 : 52 ] Now we have one more ground of assurance, but we'll come back to that next time. For now, let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank you that our assurance rests first and foremost upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

We thank you that you have given us your sure promises and the evidence of your Spirit's work within us. help us to look first to Christ and then to rejoice in every evidence of your sanctifying grace.

I pray that you would continue your work in us, conforming us to the image of your Son. And we pray this in the name of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.