

# LIVING WELL #9: BUILDING ASSURANCE WELL

ESV TCL 2026/02/15

## 1. What is meant by 'assurance'?

Christian assurance is the certainty of our relationship with God the Father in the Lord Jesus Christ conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit – a Trinitarian definition (Ephesians 1:17).

WCF<sup>1</sup>: 'infallible assurance of faith', or in scripture:

Colossians 2:2 ... all the riches of **full assurance** of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ... ESV

1 Thessalonians 1:5 ... our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with **full conviction**. ESV

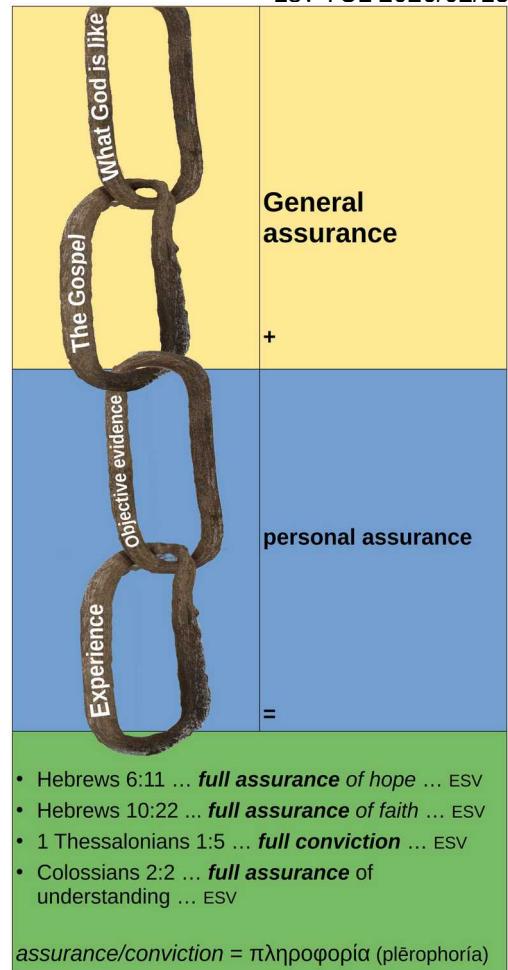
Hebrews 6:11 And we desire each one of you to ... have the **full assurance** of hope ... . ESV

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near with a true heart in **full assurance** of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean ... . ESV

## 2. Should we expect to have assurance?

According to the WCF<sup>1</sup>, **full assurance** can be hard-won and sometimes lost but is, nevertheless, the normal Christian experience.

It is helpful to see assurance as being in two halves, each of which is then in two quarters.



General assurance + Personal assurance = Full assurance

General assurance is a matter of confidence in the gospel and is based upon knowing what God is like. Vital though this is, even the devil may have such *impersonal* assurance.

Personal assurance is correctly based on objective biblical evidence of God's working in our lives, plus a felt experience of peace, sonship and hope of glory, as described in the verses above, plus Romans 8 and numerous other passages.

If the weakest link in the chain is broken, we will lack **full assurance**.

## 3. THE BASIS OF ASSURANCE – WHAT GOD IS LIKE (LINK #1)

God is sovereign, good and loving.

**Q1.** What sort of things might undermine our faith in God's sovereignty?

Romans 1:20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ESV

<sup>1</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646/7

**Q2. What might cause us to doubt God's goodness?**

*Romans 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realising that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? NIV*



#### **4. THE GOSPEL GUARANTEE OF ASSURANCE (LINK #2)**

*'The [Wesleyan] Methodists aim at a methodical conversion that carries immediate certainty with it. They place men before the law, cause them to see their utter sinfulness and terrible guilt, and frighten them with the terrors of the Lord. And after they have thus brought them under the terrifying influence of the law, they at once introduce them to the full and free gospel of redemption, which merely calls for a willing acceptance of Christ as their Saviour. In a single moment sinners are transported on waves of emotion from the deepest sorrow into the most exalted joy. And this sudden change carries with it an immediate assurance of redemption. He who believes, is also sure that he is redeemed. This does not mean, however, that he is also certain of ultimate salvation. This is a certainty to which the consistent Methodist cannot attain since he believes in a falling away of the saints [i.e. Christians].'<sup>2</sup>*

**Q3. In what ways might a Wesleyan version of the gospel undermine a Christian's general assurance (according to Prof Berkhof)?**



*Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ESV*

<sup>2</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (single volume abridged version), pp508/9, *Banner of Truth* 1979 reprint.

## 5. THE OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE OF (PERSONAL) ASSURANCE (LINK #3)

*"Hello, my name is Mandy. I have been a Christian for 10 years now, so I know what it means to persevere. I give a tenth of my earnings<sup>3</sup> to my local church, and write letters to persecuted believers in prison in closed countries. I pray and read my Bible every day. I usually make it to the church prayer meeting and Bible study, so I am confident that I am growing week by week. As a regular attender at Sunday evening services, I feel that there is plenty of evidence that I am not what the Westminster Confession calls a 'hypocrite' or 'other unregenerate' person 'who vainly deceive themselves with false hopes, and carnal presumptions'!"<sup>4</sup>*



**Q4.** How might you wish to, er, encourage Mandy?

Do the following texts help?

*Matthew 7:16 By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thorn-bushes, or figs from thistles? NIV*

*Galatians 5:19-23 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,<sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,<sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ESV*

*1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. NIV*

*2 Peter 1:5-11*

## 6. THE FELT EXPERIENCE OF ASSURANCE (LINK #4)

**Q5.** What do the following passages teach us about having a felt assurance of salvation?

<sup>3</sup> See Luke 18:12

<sup>4</sup> WCF XVIII 1.

*Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and 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.* ESV



*Romans 8:15-16 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!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ...* ESV

*Matthew 14:31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of [Peter], saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt [διστάζω (distázō)]?"* ESV

*Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* ESV

*Matthew 26:27-28 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, <sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins<sup>5</sup>.* ESV

*John 6:67-69 So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" <sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, <sup>69</sup> and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."* ESV

## 7. SUMMARY

If we feel a lack of Christian assurance, we must engage in a healthy sort of introspection: *2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.*

<sup>5</sup> The Lord's supper as a means of assurance should never be denigrated as somehow 'sacramentalist' or 'high church'.

Check which is the weakest link for you in the chain of assurance and work on that.

Factors such as mental illness, severe trials, isolation<sup>6</sup>, or a misunderstanding of the gospel can rob us of felt assurance. But, by daily repentance and availing ourselves of what the WCF<sup>1</sup> XVIII(3) calls '*the right use of ordinary means*', we will normally come to and remain at the point where we can sincerely recite:

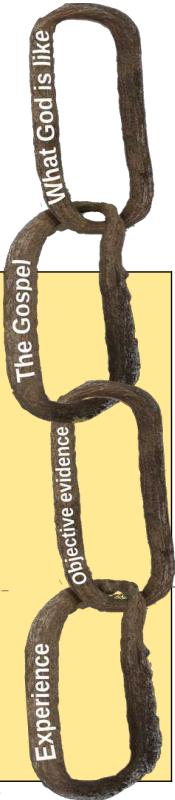
**Q. Christian, what is your only comfort in life and in death?**

**A. That I am not my own, but belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ.**

*He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.*

*He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.*

*Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.* <sup>7</sup>



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<sup>6</sup> e.g. John the baptist in prison in Matthew 11:2-4.

<sup>7</sup> Heidelberg Catechism, 1563. Tr. DWL.