

What is the source of assurance of eternal life?

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According to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) Chapter XVIII, paragraph, II, the three facets of assurance of salvation are:

- 1). the promises of God's Word,
- 2). the works which the Holy Spirit produces, and
- 3). the inner witness of the Spirit to the believer.

According to this confession all of these statements must be present for one to be reasonably confident of personal salvation. But is this a true Biblical statement?

It would seem, based on Biblical information, that only one of these statements of this creed is needed; namely, *the promises of God's Word*, for assurance of everlasting life to be confirmed. After all it is the Word of God that claims to be without error and to be truth (John 17:17) not men's words.

Good works may have a secondary, confirmatory value, but are not necessary for assurance of everlasting life. Good works are more for vindication man to man (James 2). But what about the so-called inner witness of the Spirit?

"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God". Actually the text states "bears witness with our spirit..." (*summartureo*, Rom. 8:16). The passage presents two witnesses, the Holy Spirit and the human spirit. They both bear witness together (OT principle of a least two witnesses). The Holy Spirit bears witness along with our human spirit that we are children of God. This is recorded in the written Word of God (Rom. 8:16).

But to whom does He (the Holy Spirit) bear witness? Contextually, Romans 8:15 indicates that we, our human spirit, cries out, “Abba, Father”. Our witness, then, is to God the Father. If the Holy Spirit is bearing witness with our human spirits, then He, too, must bear witness to God the Father. This is confirmed in Romans 8:26 which indicates that whenever we pray the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. Clearly the Person to whom He is interceding for is us to God the Father. God the Father is the One that both our spirit and the Holy Spirit bears witness to.

The Holy Spirit’s witness occurs when we pray (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; Luke 11:2). The Holy Spirit witnesses to God the Father that we are in fact His children. Whenever a believer in Christ prays the Holy Spirit confirms the validity that we are God’s children. We are aware of when our human spirit cries out to God in prayer, calling Him “Father”, but we are unable to monitor the Holy Spirit’s confirming witness. The only evidence we have that this is done is that the **Word of God** reveals this, and the Word is true.

The apostle John wrote that if we accept the testimony of God concerning Jesus, then we **know** (*oida-2nd, pl., subj., “eidete”*) **we have eternal life** (I John 5:9-13). Assurance is objective. It is sourced in the Gospel. “He who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47). If we accept Jesus’ claim then we **know** that we have everlasting life! Surely if we can know that we have everlasting life simply by accepting the testimony of God, then nothing else is needed.

When I was born my parents were given a birth certificate stating that I was a native of Texas and a citizen of the U.S.A. This birth certificate objectively testifies to me that I’m a U.S. citizen today. I need not evaluate how I feel to determine if I’m really a U.S. citizen. My birth certificate is all I need to prove my birth.

The **birth certificate of the believer is God's Word**. It objectively testifies to us that we are citizens of heaven. We are God's children, and we have everlasting life. Those who search for the so-called inner witness of the Spirit do so in vain since that is the Holy Spirit's witness to God the Father, **not to us**.

The Scriptures are the **real witness** of the Holy Spirit to us (Eph. 1:13; Rom. 10:14-17; I Cor. 2:12-13). The Spirit's work in **assurance** is through the Word of God, not through feelings. Only on the basis of the promises of God as revealed in His Word can we have absolute **assurance** that we are His children (Heb. 12:6-8). With this **assurance** we then are able to confidently call Him our Father.