

“Providence that Pressures Assurance” ▫ WCF 18.4.p (2) (TPH p930)

2024.08.11 Sabbath School Lesson

Hopewell ARPC, Culleoka, TN

4. True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God’s withdrawing the light of His countenance, and suffering even such as fear Him to walk in darkness and to have no light:^p

yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart, and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived;^q and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair.^r

Ps. 77:1–10.

¹ I cried out to God with my voice—To God with my voice;
And He gave ear to me.

² In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord;
My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing;
My soul refused to be comforted.

³ I remembered God, and was troubled;
I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah

⁴ You hold my eyelids open;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

⁵ I have considered the days of old,
The years of ancient times.

⁶ I call to remembrance my song in the night;
I meditate within my heart,
And my spirit makes diligent search.

⁷ Will the Lord cast off forever?

And will He be favorable no more?

⁸ Has His mercy ceased forever?

Has His promise failed forevermore?

⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious?

Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Selah

¹⁰ And I said, "This is my anguish;

But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."

- The prayer/song of a genuine believer
- Genuine/serious trouble
- Feeling cast off by the Lord
- Forced to remember God's character, Word, and history for comfort

Ps. 31:22.

²² For I said in my haste,

"I am cut off from before Your eyes";

Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications

When I cried out to You.

- Occasioned by attack (v2, 7–8, 11–13, 17–18)
- Which brought remaining sin to mind (v10)
- Momentarily diminished/intermittent assurance

Luke 22:31–34.

³¹ And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." ³³ But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."

³⁴ Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."

Matt. 26:69–72.

⁶⁹ Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee." ⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying." ⁷¹ And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷² But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!"

- Sometimes sudden, vehement temptation is precisely because we will fall into it and discover the power of remaining sin

▪ For believers, the point is more about Christ's praying for us, humbling us, restoring us, using us. *But since you have no special revelation about your status, you cannot know this, when you give in to the sin.*

q. 1John 3:9. Luke 22:32. Ps. 51:8, 12. ▪ r. Mic. 7:7–9. Jer. 32:40. Isa. 54:7–14. 2Cor. 4:8–10.

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. Please be aware of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

So the fourth article in the chapter on Assurance of Faith, Reads. True. Believers may have the Assurance of their faith divers ways, shaken diminished and intermitted. As by negligence, in preserving of it, By falling into some special sin, which wounded the conscience, and grieveth the spirit. By some sudden or vehement Temptation, By God's withdrawing the light of his countenance and suffering even such as fear Him.

To walk in darkness and to have no light. Yet, are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God and life of faith? That love of Christ and the Brethren that sincerity of heart, and conscience of Duty, out of which by the operation of the spirit, this Assurance May in due time be revived.

And by the, which in the meantime, They are supported from utter. Despair. So last week, we considered the first two ways that Our Assurance of Faith, our assurance, that we belong to the Lord and are in a state of grace. We thought about two ways in which that happens.

One is by negligence in the preservance in the preserving of it. So you don't attend upon the means of Grace. And When you're not attending upon the means of Grace, then you're not attending upon God himself in his means. Uh, there are many who use means, but they don't attend upon him.

They're not having fellowship with the Lord in his word, and receiving the word is spoken to them. By God, they're not having Fellowship with the Lord. In prayer. Uh, they're not having fellowship with the Lord himself and the public worship, they're just doing acts of worship. And When you become, Unmindful of the Lord and you leave off interacting with him.

According to the Rhythm that he has established in our lives for doing. So then it's not surprising. Then when your assurances Interrupted or diminished. The second way that we considered last week was by the falling into some special sin. Which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the spirit. And there we had from the scripture, especially David and Uh, has sinned.

Bathsheba. And, And in that case that we considered also how the the two different ways of having your Assurance shaken or interrupted or decreased. Uh, were combined there because David ended up in that sin by way of spiritual negligence, uh, by the loss of tenderness of heart to the Lord that he had had earlier in his walk with Christ.

Well, sometimes it's not. Quote unquote, our fault. Uh, I say that meaning that there isn't a particular sin or a particular backsliding. That becomes the occasion for The loss of the Assurance. Um, but the reason I say quote unquote is because It is always our fault. If we had

eyes to see rightly, if we understood what the scripture said, if our hearts meant to the Lord, as they ought always to go to the Lord.

We would never lack Assurance. In fact, we almost would not need Assurance because we would have such pleasure in God himself and him being glorified in Christ that we would be. Uh, we would be self-forgetful and Christ remembering and Delight in his. And his glory would be at to us to say as Assurance of Faith.

So there is a sense in which it is Uh, it is always our fault but sometimes the occasion. For feeling like God is far from you. Or like you might not actually belong to him. You might not J. Genuinely truly believe in the Lord Jesus, you might not genuinely be converted.

Those are scary things and they happen to Believers. Uh and sometimes the occasion for those things isn't a particular sin or an allowing of your spiritual life and your your Uh, fellowship with the Lord in his means to slide. Sometimes the occasion is a particular Providence. That the Lord permits you to go through ordains for you to go through sometimes.

Uh, the occasion is a particular Temptation. That the Lord Wills and permits. Uh, for you to undergo that Temptation. Um and often a temptation that you fall into not in the way that David fell into the Temptation that we were thinking about last week. Psalm 51 and The context in his life, in which Psalm 51 came.

But sometimes the sort of Temptation that Peter. Uh, indooed and buckled under which was not lack of Maintenance. Although we could look at the scripture and we can see that Perhaps a little less self-assurance and pride and a little more watching and praying unless he entered into temptation. And yet.

Um, Peter was not in the midst of backsliding. When he fell to his sudden and serious Temptation, and So, these two things are things that happen to Christians. It's really good for you children. To be hearing about that and thinking about that and getting it stored in your heart.

It's really good for us adults. Uh, also, Uh, and Particularly when you're not in the middle of the hard Providence and you're not in the middle of the sudden and severe temptation that you to your own horror and, and Uh, Terror embarrassment, shame. Uh, shock, there's the word I was looking for for your own shock fall.

Pray to this temptation perhaps just in your mind your heart and just for a few seconds and yet the sort of Temptation where you you can hardly believe that your heart or mind would go there. Would think that towards that person would desire that about that situation? Etc. Uh, because it is in the times when the Lord is being gentle with you and and he has, you steady Uh, that you are most.

Most ready? Most aware. Less affected by the the shock and the difficulty of the emotion of the circumstance that you can build up an understanding of what happens in the Christian Life. Is it like to walk with the Lord in this life when your faith is still imperfect? When you're still growing?

Right in your uh, in your walk with the Lord. So that when you do come into the hard Providence, Not cramming theologically and spiritually to try to figure out how to survive it. When you do come into the the the sudden and Grievous and shocking. Temptation. Uh, you're not You're not trying to remember these things and assimilate them when you're already emotionally overwhelmed By this new glimpse of your remaining sin and how bad it really is and it is bad.

One of the illusions that we can sometimes have, if the Lord has given us to walk steadily with him a while is to lose the, the horror the ugliness, the hatefulness, the filthiness of our remaining sinfulness Um, this is, of course something that as we Um, as we practice biblical praying, we are helped in.

For instance, the prayer prompt Again, and if you attended prayer, reading consistently enough, long, long enough. You start to recognize when the same ones come back around. But the prayer prompt and confession of sin for this coming. Midweek meeting is to view our sins in their most horrible light.

And as we confess them before, God, so that we don't lose. Um, how bad our sin is and sometimes the Lord will suffer us. To endure a Temptation and our remaining sin lays hold of it. And And we committed, even if it's just in the heart. And, Uh, and he Permits us then to stumble.

Um, I think we'll just take the passages in the order that they're given. The first proof text they give us is in Psalm 77 1-10. To the chief musician to Judith in a psalm of ASAP. I cried out to God with my voice to God with my voice. And he gave ear to me, in the day of my trouble.

I sought the Lord. My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing my soul refused. To be comforted. I remembered God and was troubled. Okay, so as his soul reaches out to God to be comforted, the fact that he doesn't get the Comfort means that his remembering God is actually troubling him right now.

Because he's doing the spiritual math, he's saying there's comfort in God, he rules over all, how come when I reach out to him and I cry out to him, I'm not getting the Comfort. Does that mean that this God who I remember is this way? That I don't belong to him.

And he doesn't belong to me. So I remembered God and was troubled. If you remember the Book of Job, this was one of the great troubles for the Book of Job, it wasn't that he had forgotten God. That he knew what walking with God was supposed to ultimately be like and he wasn't getting the comfort out of it.

Uh, and so children when we, when we teach you to uh walk and fellowship with the Lord, not just to read and pray at the beginning and end of every day. But to interact with him and when we teach you that there's delight and sweetness and fellowship in that and sometimes you have it and sometimes for an extended period of your life, you try and you cannot find that help.

And you start wondering Is it true for everyone else? But me, is there something wrong with me and my walk with the Lord? There is of course something wrong in that moment that the Lord is letting you go through. But you hear things like Psalm, 77 things like Psalm 119 81-88.

Like, we had in the morning sermon this past week and you realize, these are things that God takes as children too, his children through and you keep sticking to him in that Fellowship in seeking that Fellowship in Reading in prayer and crying out to him. So I remembered God and was troubled.

I complained and my spirit was overwhelmed. You hold my eyelids open. I'm so troubled that I cannot speak. Um, those of you who have had Difficulty, falling asleep at night, over anxiety, and particularly spiritual anxiety before. The Lord, I've considered the days of old the years of ancient times.

I called to remembrance my song in the night. I meditate within my heart. And my spirit makes diligent search will the Lord cast off forever. Be favorable. No more has his Mercy ceased forever. Has his promise failed. Forevermore has God forgotten to be gracious. Has he in Anger? Shut up.

His Tender Mercies. Well. One question would have gotten the point across especially in the conciseness of poetry where language is very economically. Spent But when poetry decides to spend six questions on what one question could have you feel the effect of it? You start to feel the forever forever, forgotten forever.

Even just in the language, this is sometimes the experience of the believer and this is a Believer. He's continuing to cry out to the Lord. This is the prayer and song of a genuine believer. And he is. Uh, some genuine and serious trouble and the greatest trouble. Is that he feels that the Lord has cast cast him off and he says, and I said, or there's the say law, say law, oh I missed a say law earlier.

I don't know why it's actual Hebrew scripture. Just like the superscripts are So, The English version that I have in front of me, kind of Uh, makes it look like an annotation of some kind. Say a law, by the way. Does not mean pause. I've probably told you this before the Hebrew root of the word means, increase.

Um, So it is a musical term and there are about four different things. It might mean, it might mean like a key change. Um, it might mean to increase volume and so there it could be Dynamics. Uh, it could be. To increase, uh, pace. Uh, that the that the music would get faster.

Um, So, it's not really. Necessarily an interlude, although Um, in Temple worship with the instrumentation that David had. Uh, had prepared for the temple. As a function of the priesthood. You definitely could have Um, Priestly instrumental interlude. Reminding that the worship is ordained by God and that the priesthood is there, mediating.

So that heaven is interacting with Earth. Then some sort of intensification in that all that because I messed us a lot, but the Lord gives sometimes blessed aggressions. So there's this intensification at the end of verse 3, there's this intensification. At the end of verse 9. Uh and then he says and I said, this is my anguish but I will remember.

The years of the right hand of the most high notice again. Um if you if you've got a helpful English translation like the one in front of me, the but I will remember is in italics, so it's actually the years of the right hand of the most high are still his anguish.

And then in verse 11, he insists on Remembering the work. Uh, and Oh, you don't have verse 11. If they didn't give us verse 11. Again, remember Um, the Westminster assembly. Uh, the ministers there, the congregations, especially that they pastored and preached to and wrote for They just had more Bible knowledge than we do, so they would More context.

The word Lord. In verse 2, in verse 7 is Adonai. It's not yet Yahweh Uh, and so there's there's a transition that comes between verse 10 and 11, where he's not just holding on, to God as God is, and God has spoken. And as God has acted in the past in verse 11.

It's very subtle. He says, I will remember the works of Yahweh. He uses the Covenant name even though he does not currently feel the comfort of the Covenant. God Do not listen to your emotions. Your emotions are liars. And one of the things, the Lord gives us to go through hard times for is to remind us.

That our emotions lie. But that he is true. And that when you do not feel that he is yours, if you are his covenantally, You have the right by Christ's blood, which doesn't just atone for sin in an everlasting way. But Christ's blood now is what binds the visible Church on Earth.

To the Living God and you have a right to call upon him as yours. This is one of the things children that you have. In your baptism, even before you profess your faith. That he is your Covenant God by the blood of Jesus, which has set apart the visible church now until you believe that puts you in great danger.

Because you're in a visible church that has been set apart to God by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, in that Covenant relationship between God and his church on the earth. And so you need all the more the righteousness of Jesus and the Forgiveness of Jesus. But when you are believing in Jesus and when your Assurance is shaken, Then you can say I may not feel like I am his and I may not feel like he is mine.

But I That I am at least in Covenant with him as a member of his church. I know that none who belong to Christ, who have Christ can be lost and you still call him your own. You still say Our Father, You don't say, well, I don't really feel like a child right now and he doesn't really feel to me like a father.

No, the church is taught to pray Our Father. And the children of Believers right, along with their parents. You know. Yeah, we don't, you know, hopefully the uh, those of kind of a baptistic persuasion are inconsistent on this point and they don't teach their children to say everyone else in the church is Father in Heaven.

Hallowed be thy name. No, Our Father. In heaven and so here it doesn't feel to him. It does whatever the circumstance is, whatever. The provenance is. That has him feeling like the Lord has forsaken him forgotten him. Like he doesn't belong to God at all. He knows that he belongs to God at least covenantally, he knows these truths about God and even though remembering God is giving him pain right now, he determines all the more to remember him.

I will remember the works of going anyway, we've gone. Uh, we've gone past the Section that they give us for a proof text here but that's one way. That God withdrawing the light of his countenance and suffering, even such as fear Him to walk in darkness and to have no light.

That is Uh, that's one way that God forces us to remember his character, his word, and his history until I hold of him as ours. Similarly, in Psalm 31. And I'm not entirely sure of the logic behind. Why they give just the one verse in Psalm 31 where there's a lot in the context.

Uh, that helps us. And this is the experience of a momentary loss of assurance. Uh, really is such a a frequent and Distressing experience of genuine, Believers that the Psalms are full of it, not just the Psalms, but the narrative, Narrative. Portions of scripture are full of it. The Epistles are full of it.

And and so the Lord really he does this but he cares very much that we would navigate it. Uh well according to his word, So Psalm 31 verse 22. He says, for I said, in my haste, I am cut off from before your eyes. Nevertheless, you heard the voice of my supplications, when I cried out to you, and he says, I am cut off before your eyes.

He doesn't mean God doesn't see me anymore. Okay, God always sees us. But there is The that sense of God having us as the apple of his eye. Uh, God always in everything that he sees in in the Earth, seeing it through the lens of his love for believers and his purposes towards his elect.

Uh, and That's what he means. I'm caught off from before your eyes looking upon me favorably. Nevertheless, you heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to you. So his feeling that he was cut off from before God's eyes, that God was not favorable towards him. It was occasioned by.

Attack. If you've got Uh, one of the handouts, you can see, verse 2, verses 7-8 verse 11 through 13 or if you've got a Bible, obviously, um, 11-13 17 and 18, all of these describe his, uh, being under attack. The way that he prays to the Lord is obviously believing not backsliding and yet, In the midst of his attack, he still remembers.

That this is what he ultimately deserves. Whenever you go through suffering, whenever you're attacked whenever you're persecuted, And even when you are wrongly accused. Of one thing. Um, you are still worse than you or your accuser could imagine in your remaining sin. Um, So I'm sure it was Spurgeon and it's a paraphrase because I don't remember the direct quote.

But when men, Um say speak evil of you take heart. You are much more evil than they could imagine. Um, Uh, but that's something that in the midst of attack in the midst of persecution, in the midst of suffering, as one of the things that the Lord brings to our mind.

And so verse 10, In that psalm, my life is spent with grief, and my ears was sighing, my strength fails because And it's an assalam in which he has been being attacked. And so you expect like, Because of my enemies because of their slander because whatever my strength fails because of my iniquity.

And my bones waste away. So in the midst of the trouble, the worst part of the whole trouble. Is that he feels and knows he actually deserves worse than this. When we think of ourselves in relation to men, our great trouble may be In them and especially in ourselves and how we're responding to them.

But then we come before God and our great trouble before him is always, uh, is always our iniquity. Uh, and so this is momentarily. Uh, diminished or intermittent. Assurance. You notice that he recounts in verse 22. I said in my haste, I am cut off from before your eyes.

Nevertheless, you heard the voice of my supplications? God's wisdom in. How he deals with you in your life. Dear Christian is multivaried. It is different in different circumstances. He doesn't always leave you in an extended season. Of lacking Assurance, sometimes he lets your Assurance be shaken so that you'll cry out.

And as you cry out He hears your voice. And he and he makes you to have the comfort in him. Uh, and so his purposes in every situation, uh, Multiple complex in that particular situation and then they're different from one situation to another. When he gives you to know his goodness and how he brings you through something.

Uh, that doesn't mean you figured out why You you may you say I figured out why the Lord let this. Well, not really God has given for me to know. One of the one aspect of his goodness, one aspect of his wisdom, one aspect of his love towards me in doing this.

And then, the last two, Scripture proofs, they give us are especially related to the sudden and vehement Temptation. And, We're almost out of time. So I'm not going to flip. We'll just read the Versus their familiar circumstance from Luke before the Temptation and then from Matthew in the Temptation and the Lord said Simon Simon indeed.

Satan has asked for you that he may sift, you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail. You have returned to me, strengthen your brethren. But he said to him, Lord, I am ready to go with you both the prison and to death.

And he said, I tell you Peter, the rooster shall not grow this day. Before you will deny three times that, you know me. So you get a an idea of the suddenness of the Temptation as far as Peter is concerned. Peter was walking with the Lord, Peter knew that it might cost him his life.

He was resolved. That he would give his life if necessary he is not in a season. Of sinful backsliding. And so when the Temptation comes, it is sudden and all the more shocking and painful and horrible. Um, so do not think if you are in a season of walking with the Lord and resolve to belong to him, that you are immune uh to this sort of Temptation.

Um, And that old dovetail very well with the sermon uh not too long from now. And then in Matthew 26. Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard and the servant girl came to him saying you also were with Jesus of Galilee but he denied it before them all saying I do not know what you are saying.

And when he had gone out to the Gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there this fellow Was with Jesus of Nazareth. But again, he denied with an oath. I do not know the man. Now, you see here that the Lord ordains and permits. Uh, that Peter will.

Uh, suffer Temptation and suffer, such Temptation, as he knows that Peter will give into. Because he tells him ahead of time when you have returned to me, Uh, so Uh so God does he doesn't tempt us in the way of offering to us the sin. It is our own sinful nature that does so James chapter 1.

But he does ordain for us to go through situations that will try us to show. That remaining sinfulness that is within us and the power of it. So sometimes sudden vehement Temptation is precisely because we will fall into it and discover the power of remaining sin. Yet, for believers.

In this case, for Peter, if you see that the way that the Lord introduced it, Uh and then therefore when Peter comes to his right mind and is looking back on it, he would always Um, by the help of the spirit, remember his denying Christ, in the context of what Jesus said beforehand.

Okay, for the Christian. The Christian is someone who knows that the story of his life is Christ. And what Christ is doing and what Christ has said, what Christ will have done when he's, when he's done with us. So, for for, for believers for Peter. In this case, the point is more about Christ, having prayed for him Christ, humbling him.

Christ's restoring him Christ's continuing to use him. Now, do not take this as an excuse to sin and say, well this will be really good for me because Jesus will humble me. And Jesus will restore me, and Jesus will use me. You rationalize sin like that on the front end, you have no business.

Um, believing that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, I put as a note to that effect, but since you have no special Revelation about your status, you cannot know this when you are giving in to the sin. Um, So, Assurance never As we studied at length in the earlier articles.

Of this chapter in the confession. It never excuses sin. All right, let's go ahead and bring. We thank you, Father for teaching us. Uh, about the different circumstances. That can make us wonder if we are yours. And that can, Rob us momentarily. Of certainty that we are and of the light of your face.

We pray, Lord, especially for Among us or any even. Who are apart from us, perhaps. Uh, in connection with having lost Assurance and not walking well with you right now. We pray for all in our congregation that. Uh, you would give us to understand. Um, how you often deal with us in these various ways?

To respond rightly to you. Never to let go. Of lifting up our hearts to you and looking to you and develop for fellowship with you, in the means of your grace clinging to Christ. Laying claim upon your Covenant bond with us as members of your church and all the more as those who believe in the Lord Jesus.

Help us Lord. We pray in our lives to make good use of these things that you teach us in your word. We ask in Christ's name. Amen.