

“Strength When Assurance Is Weak” ▫ WCF 18.4.r (TPH p930)

2024.08.25 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: 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

Micah 7:5–9

- ⁵ Do not trust in a friend;
Do not put your confidence in a companion;
Guard the doors of your mouth
From her who lies in your bosom.
- ⁶ For son dishonors father,
Daughter rises against her mother,
Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
A man’s enemies *are* the men of his own household.
- ⁷ Therefore I will look to the Lord;
I will wait for the God of my salvation;
My God will hear me.
- ⁸ Do not rejoice over me, my enemy;
When I fall, I will arise;
When I sit in darkness,
The Lord will be a light to me.
- ⁹ I will bear the indignation of the Lord,
Because I have sinned against Him,
Until He pleads my case
And executes justice for me.

He will bring me forth to the light;
I will see His righteousness.

- During time when sanctification is imperfect, and chastening is necessary, we must not trust in or adhere to sinners such as we are but to the Lord Himself
- Even when we ourselves are under chastening, our only hope is still the Lord Who has chastened us.

Jeremiah 32:38–41

³⁸They shall be My people, and I will be their God; ³⁹then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. ⁴⁰And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. ⁴¹Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.’

- the visible church are taught to trust in Him Who makes them members of the invisible church “that they will not depart” from Him. Isaiah 54:7–14

⁷ “For a mere moment I have forsaken you,
But with great mercies I will gather you.
⁸ With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment;
But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,”
Says the Lord, your Redeemer.
⁹ “For this is like the waters of Noah to Me;
For as I have sworn
That the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth,
So have I sworn
That I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you.
¹⁰ For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed,
But My kindness shall not depart from you,
Nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,”
Says the Lord, who has mercy on you.
¹¹ “O you afflicted one,
Tossed with tempest, and not comforted,
Behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems,
And lay your foundations with sapphires.
¹² I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal,
And all your walls of precious stones.
¹³ All your children shall be taught by the Lord,

And great shall be the peace of your children.

¹⁴ In righteousness you shall be established;
You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear;
And from terror, for it shall not come near you.”

▪ Reminder of our teaching sections from Isaiah 54. *Flourishing joy for the currently barren*, v1–3.

Affectionate love for the currently forsaken, v4–8.

Faithful covenant blessing for those being chastened, v9–10.

Fearless peace for the currently attacked, v11–17.

▪ The history of what the Servant has done for the bride is a lesson in His character and manner for the members of that bride.

2Corinthians 4:7–11

⁷But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. ⁸We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

▪ Whatever God does in the believer's life is to show the excellence and power of God (v7) and the life of Jesus (v11)

▪ Just as external circumstances are not permitted to destroy a believer (v8–9), the same principle and certainty of the perseverance of the saints applies to spiritual trial like the diminishing or intermitting of our assurance.

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, For. Hoping by God's help to finish up the last part of Uh, Westminster Confession, chapter 18. On uh, on Assurance Assurance of Faith or assurance that we are in. The State of Grace. Uh, that fourth article as a whole reads, True, Believers may have the Assurance of their salvation divers ways, shaken diminished, and intermittent.

As by negligence, in preserving of it, By falling into some special sin which wounded the conscience and grieved with the spirit. Buys some sudden or vehement Temptation, By Gods, withdrawing the light of his countenance and suffering, even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light.

Are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God and life of faith? 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 witch in the meantime, They are supported.

From utter despair.

Uh, and it's that last part, uh, by the witch, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair. Uh, that we are thinking about this morning. So, Uh, last Lord's day we were thinking about how When your Assurance is interrupted, If you are a Believer, you do not need to know.

Or be sure that you are a Believer to be a believer. If you're a Believer, God has regenerated you. And he will keep you. If you are a Believer, he has turned your faith, turned your trust, and Hope from yourself to Christ. And so losing. Hope about yourself doesn't take away your hope.

Because your Hope was not in yourself. It takes away pleasantness. It takes away. Much that helps us. Uh, but it Turn us more to Christ. And uh, so the seed of God and the life of faith. And then Those Graces that God is still working in the heart when he takes away.

Our Assurance or causes our Assurance to be diminished. He doesn't take away. Uh, his working of Grace in the heart. Even the process of sanctifying us and so forth. Um, but what about the in between time? Uh, between When your Assurance is shaken. And when he brings you back to, A place where you Have again, an Assurance of Uh, how are you?

Uh, what is the life of the Christian like, in the midst of the difficulty? And the answer is, uh, that the life of the Christian depends upon the Lord. It is. Uh it is the Lord's power that has made you a Christian. If you're a Christian it's the Lord's power that will keep you a Christian.

So we've already considered the doctrine of the perseverance of the Saints. That is. Um, what rather crudely but Genuinely and truly is sometimes called once saved, always saved. Well. That. That is true and that is certain And that is because God is the one who is working in you now this Uh, if you are No lacking Assurance.

This gives you a place for Comfort. To find your comfort not in yourself, but in the Lord alone, Uh, and it gives you counsel for where to go for. For your Assurance, to ask the Lord to restore you. To the place where you were before. Now they've given us For proof texts.

And really you could have had Uh, any one of hundreds of passages? From the Psalms and the prophets, especially Uh, the Psalms dealing both corporately and individually with such times in believer's lives. Is one of the reasons why you should probably always have your nose in the Psalms for study.

And it goes without saying that you should always be in the Psalms for prayer. And for singing Um, as I hope you have richly enjoyed discovering and growing as we have all done that together. But he takes. Three passages in the prophets and then one from second Corinthians or they give us three passages from the prophets.

And then one from second Corinthians, The one from second Corinthians. Um, you know, reasons. Really, with respect to. Difficulties in external circumstances, but there's a logic to it. A kind of how much more logic that if that's true. When the circumstances are hard, Externally, how much more true when you are in a spiritual crisis?

In your own heart. So the first uh first one they gave us is Micah 7 verses seven through nine. But in God's Providence, we have just been in a passage where the Lord Jesus. Uh, was

warning not just the disciples for their training Mission but especially us. That. In a world where not everyone is saved.

And then families and churches where not everyone may be saved. Uh we the the more when you are converted and then in families and churches where there are those who are saved but uh we're in different places in sanctification. This. I think just last Lord's Day's morning, sermon Well, that you will have strife and difficulty even within a family.

Uh, between those who are more instructive, those who are more mature in Grace, those who are more conscientiously committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, according to his word, And those who are more worldly. Whether converted or just? Whether unconverted or just immature. And so, as the Lord is addressing his people, in the Book of Micah, and he's talking about Uh, not just his chastening them, but his restoring them, he's cautioning them not to go along with, uh, the church necessarily or even with their own family.

Necessarily. But to, to return to the Lord. And, So, we've added We've taken verses five and six also to help with the context here. So he says, do not trust in a friend, do not put your confidence in a companion guard. The doors of your mouth from her who lies, in your bosom, for son dishonors, father, daughter Rises against her mother daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

The man's enemies are the men of his own household. Therefore, I will look to Yahweh. I will wait for the god of my salvation. My God will hear me. Do not Rejoice over me my enemy. When I fall, I will arise When I sit in darkness, Yahweh will be a light to me.

I will bear the indignation of Yahweh. Because I have sinned against him. Until he pleads my case, and executes Justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light. I will see. His righteousness. And so, When you are in a, Of spiritual. Uh, depression. Spiritual Darkness. You've lost your Assurance of Faith.

You feel like you are not a Christian. You're still sure that Christ saves. Uh, but you feel pretty certain Or maybe you don't feel certain you, you do not feel certain that you are saved. One of the things that you need to remember is that this tube comes In God's Providence to you.

And that as you cling to him, there are times in the life of his people corporately and, uh, specifically even within those times, every one of us should receive it also, Personally. And then there are times in the believer's life, personally. Where the Lord? Uh, she's fed. Make, you know, has indignation.

As it says here, I will bear the indignation of the Lord, you know. Fatherly displeasure. As the language that we use for that. Um, now There are many Church contexts and there is much Christian literature. That will try to teach you not to see or feel. God's fatherly displeasure.

When you are struggling, spiritually. But this is something that God does in the life of his people. This is something he does for the purpose. Of. Of chasing us of bringing us to repentance and when you feel it, well, Micah. 7 is teaching you to do here. Is that while you wait for?

Wait, for being restored. Wait for feeling reconciled. Wait for Assurance to return. You know, this hasn't happened yet. He says, I will bear the indignation of Yahweh because I have sinned against him until he pleads my case. And executes Justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light.

I will see his righteousness. So he doesn't see the light yet at this time. He just knows from whom, it will come. And this is one of the many reasons that the Lord might take away. Your sense of assurance your comfort in Walking with him your joy in Walking with him.

To turn, give to himself from yourself. To make you again. Uh, first of all, trust your theology. Your right theology from the Bible God is the one who saves it is impossible for one who trusts in him to be lost. He who has begun a good work and you will bring it to completion.

You know, many of the things that, you know, from scripture there are times where God in your Christian Life, is going to take away that emotional. Uh, comfort that sense of psychological well-being with him. Uh, and when you feel like everything has gone wrong with yourself, you need to know doctrinally.

Everything has not gone wrong with God. Everything has not gone wrong with Grace. Everything has not gone wrong with Christianity. So that when you come into those Seasons, Of lacking that feeling towards God. You don't then start to doubt God himself. You don't then start to doubt Grace itself.

You don't then start to doubt Christianity itself. But you say he is the one who is doing this from, to me. Uh, and he is the one. Who will restore me to light? So, we must not trust in or adhere to Uh, Sinners either are either our family like we Heard about in the sermon from Matthew 10, where Jesus is actually quoting.

From verses five and six. Um, or in ourselves. And even when we ourselves are under chastening, our only hope is still the Lord, who has chastened us. Um, We're gonna be taking the latter profits. Chronological order. So after Isaiah, which isn't exactly first in chronological order, but it occurred to me that if we just, if we take it in the order that it is in the scripture.

Uh will be in Isaiah. Jeremiah Ezekiel for a long time. Uh, before we get into anything else. So we'll have Amos. Next is probably the earliest and then Hosea, there's a section in Hosea. Where the Lord describes himself as a lion who has torn his people. And yet. Uh, in that section what he does for his people.

As he tears them, and then he gives to them to repent and say let us return to him. We'll return to the one who has torn it. Yes. Because he's the only one in whom there is any hope. And even when you are, In the midst of that, as a Christian and God gives to you to turn to him.

This. Uh, this is one of the things that he uses to assure you. You might not feel like a Christian at the time. But the fact that you are still crying out to him, is the fact that you are crying out too and trusting in the one who is tearing you?

The one who is, who is showing you, his displeasure, the one who is Who is punishing you? Uh, this is evidence of the spirit's work in your heart. That, when your Assurance of Faith was taken. So, Certainty about yourself was taken. Your saving Faith was not. You're certainly about Christ remained.

And so this is one of the ways by which Um, The spirit revives Assurance. And it's in the meantime, one of the ways in which the spirit keeps. From utter despair. A similar thing in Jeremiah 32.

Now, this is in that section of Jeremiah, where there are several prophecies about Uh, the New Covenant. Referring to. Uh, Covenant with the visible. Uh, but not just a covenant with the visible church, but for every member of the visible church we are Uh we are to hope in that which God uh tells us about his Covenant with the church for our part in the invisible church.

In other words, he's describing how when Jesus comes and he's the prophet priest and King. There will never again, be a time. Where his church as a whole. Uh, is under his discipline. Because you'll have, Not the imperfect prophets priests and Kings that uh that Israel and Judah had before but The prophet priest and King of Um, the Hopewell church and more, more importantly, more broadly.

The visible Church on Earth is the Lord Jesus Christ. Uh, now he disciplines congregations of his church. You read that? Revelation for instance, and we hear about it almost every week, we go to the end of First Corinthians 11 and we hear about it in the the church in Corinth.

But the visible As a whole can never be under God's punishment. The way Israel came under God's punishment as a whole Why? Well, because Jesus is its Prophet priest and King, Well, for every believer. You may be under God's discipline as a Believer. But you will never be under God's Vengeance.

You will never be under God's punishment. The Vengeance that which is punitive. Has come where Where have Believers sins. Been punished children. And at the cross. Right. So Yeah, I think we've mentioned this before. This is one of the main features of our Conversations when we're giving swats as we get to the The root of the thing that we are sinners.

And you sinned, here's what God says, here's what you did. And that's a sin and you sinned, because you're a sinner. And your sin deserves? What? Hell and you're being a sinner deserves? What hell? Are you going to go to hell? And the child. Learns to answer, no. And just have, All because Jesus died on the cross for my sins.

They're in the middle of something that is going to feel very much like punishment. But we're drawing the distinction, and we talked about this a little bit. At the men's breakfast yesterday. And how the discipline. Uh, that a Christian parent gives his child needs to be the discipline of the Lord.

That we use God's means because we're trusting in God's grace. And they are means of his grace. Well, That's what's going on here. In Jeremiah. Uh, 32. Well, in this entire section. Of Jeremiah, he's teaching the people. How the church is going to function under Jesus as a whole, that the church will never again as a whole be under God's punishment and from that, from what God does, with the visible church as a whole, we learn how to interact with God, individually personally, That when God changes your heart, When God gives you Faith, when God begins a work of redeeming Grace in you, it cannot be.

End it. He will finish that work of redeeming Grace. That he begins in. Lord Welling. We'll get to Jeremiah eventually together. Um, Eventually. Understand it all. But this is a, I, I think probably because America has been so baptistic for the last 150 years or so. Understanding the New Covenant.

With what the church is going to be like with Jesus as Prophet priest and King and how that relates to or how that informs you for how to interact with God individually. Is maybe not. As well, understood. All right, so with all that by, uh, by way of introduction.

Uh, Jeremiah 32, I'm going to start in verse 38, even though they only give us verse 40. They shall be my people. And I will be their God. Then I will give them one heart. And one way that they may fear me forever, For the good of them and their children after them, And I will make an everlasting Covenant with them.

That I will not turn away from doing them. Good. But I will put my fear in their hearts, So that they will not depart from me. Yes, I will Rejoice over them to do them. Good. And I will assort, assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart.

And with all my soul, So, the visible church are taught to trust in him who makes them members. Not only of his visible. But of his invisible Church, the church that's saved forever, all of the elect throughout all of the ages. We are to trust God, that we will not depart from him.

Okay, so verse 40, very specifically, I will put my fear in their hearts So that they will not depart from me. So when you feel like you are not fearing, God when you feel like you are not trusting God knowing him, loving him obeying him. What can you do?

How does someone come to fear God? According to verse 40? It's Who puts his fear in our hearts. Okay, so when you feel like you do not fear God, what can you do?

Trust him to do it for you, okay? So it's a what question with a who answer but it's a who answer with some other instructions. Ask him prayer because prayer is a Of Grace, right. Prayer is what faith sounds like when you verbalize it So, if you're trusting in God, Than the natural language of trusting in God, is asking him for help.

And if he has told you, How he gives fear of him, how he gives you to know him and love him and obey him. Then you also do those things. What are ways that he gives us? To know and love and Obey him. What are ways that he grows us?

And knowing and loving and obeying him. Okay. So the Temptation and what happens with an unbeliever? When they lack Assurance of Faith, when they stop feeling towards God, like they think they want to feel towards God or like they have felt perhaps. Towards an idea that they had of God.

They, they do things like Not go to church. Daydream during the preaching. And check out during prayer. Grumble in their hearts when The songs aren't songs. They like rather than being admonished by The whole congregation. That is admonishing them with the work of Christ. From the scriptures and the singing.

Like, we're commanded to do. Much easier to become a sermon critic than a sermon listener. When you're not feeling towards God that way. Prayer becomes his little nap times in the middle and that's even when you go. How many of them just? You know, the bar for what it takes to miss worship, gets lower and lower.

You know, I had a headache on Thursday, I'm not sure I'm recovered yet. Have you recovered Monday? When it's time to go to work. Lord today afternoon when I want to do whatever. Saddest breaking thing I want to do, but I feel just poorly enough not to go to church Wednesday morning.

The Bible starts being. Wherever. Can't even remember where I saw it last. Okay, so

Unbelief. Responds to. Loss of feeling about God. By running away from the means of Grace. If you're a Believer and you lose that, You run to the means of Grace. Because you are more desperate for God. And you know what he uses and you know that he is the one.

Who puts his fear in our hearts. So that we will not depart from him. And indeed verse 41, he is pleased. To do us, good. Again, Isaiah 54. Uh they put verses 7 through 14 and God's provenance to us. It's just been a couple of months. Uh, since we're in Isaiah 54 together, This.

Uh, one of the many reasons why it's so profitable for those of you who Who don't just hear the serial readings in the public workbook, but you do that work and If you're a child, Uh, whose dad does the? Uh hope all at home devotionals with you at home, you could be thankful to your dad.

Actually not just like feeling thankful to your, thank your dad. Um Because he's preparing you to hear and understand the word of God as it's being read in the public Worship and then when a couple months later we come to Um, Isaiah 54 in the Sabbath School, I could just rattle off for you.

Remind you, this is in the servant section and what the servant is attaining for Israel. You remember? Israel was currently Barren. She was being described as that Barren woman, but suddenly, she's flourishing, and she's got all these children that she doesn't know where they came from. Uh, and she currently feels forsaken but she She is going to be affectionately loved.

Uh, in verses four through eight of Isaiah 54, And then verses 9 to 10, she is currently under covenantal. Punishment. But God is promising faithful Covenant blessing. Using the foreverness of the noaic Covenant never again and making application. To the restoration of Israel, being assured of belonging to God.

And then, Israel is currently under attack. From her enemies versus 11-17. But she is going to have a piece in which she never has to fear. Her enemies again. And this is what Jesus does. This is what Jesus does, for believers. Who are in the midst? Of feeling the fatherly disposer of God, feeling fruitless feeling forsaken.

Knowing themselves to be under covenantal discipline from the Lord. Being under attack from others that they are receiving, as a chastening from God. And yet, God gives Gives to us even in the midst. Of being disciplined by the Lord to turn to God in Christ and That. And Jesus.

Uh, Jesus guarantees that we shall not end this way. And so the history of what the servant has done for the bride, And specifically, for what? Uh, what he does. For Israel who is going to come under the punishment of the Assyrians. Or is under the punishment of the Assyrians at this time.

But is going to come under even the punishment Of the Babylonians, the history of what the servant, what Christ has done for the bride as a whole in history, is a lesson in his character and his manner with each of us individually. Again, we're supported from utter despair. By who it is?

That saves us. And the fact that once he starts it, he doesn't finish it. Yes, there are times that are hard in the middle of it. But it doesn't take away, who is the one who has begun saving you. And it doesn't take away the certainty that he will save you.

And then finally, second Corinthians,

Verses 7 through 11 but we have this treasure on Earth and vessels. That the Excellence of the power may be of God. And not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side yet not crushed. We're perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed.

Always carrying about in the body. The dying of the Lord Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus's sake. That

the life of Jesus also may be manifested. In our mortal flesh. So, the book ends of that, We have this treasure on Earth and vessels.

Why? That the absence of the power may be. Of God, not ourselves. And then, at the end, Do we have? The dying of the Lord Jesus. Why are we experiencing? Uh, Uh, the consequences of the curse that Jesus himself bore the wrath of God, but still, everything else that we suffer is a consequence of the curse.

And we carry around in ourselves, the dying of the Lord Jesus. So that May be manifested in us so that the life of Jesus May be manifested in. So what is it like to be a Christian? Well, there were super Apostles in Corinth who were saying it looks like always sounding good.

Always looking good. Always being liked and admired by people. Uh, always being successful. And Paul, and the other true Apostles, We're actually starting to to be despised not thought well of by many people in the Corinthian Church. And so he comes and he says no actually, this is what it's like to be a Christian.

To be hard-pressed. Perplexed persecuted and struck down. But this is also what it's like to be a Christian. Not crushed, not in despair, not forsaken, not destroyed. And when you find, Spiritually in yourself. That you are in one of these Seasons where God just doesn't seem near. And you don't know that you belong to him.

Yet, you know, that none who belong to him, can be lost. And you cling to him. Because, you know, That Christianity is for the display of the power of God. And the Life of Christ. You trust in his power. And you trust in Christ. You stick to him. And, Time for more context, but that is why.

Paul was arguing for the unimpressive preaching. Uh, at the end of chapter three in the beginning of chapter four, Because it's the power of God and the Life of Christ. And we're not trying to impress men. We're trusting in the one who actually saves. Because we know that. If he saves, he can't get unsaved.

All right, let's pray.

Lord help us. Help us. When we come into our Seasons. A feeling that you are distant even of knowing. And then we have That we have come under. Your displeasure. And your fatherly disciplined. Make us to receive that discipline from you. And know that you who give it to us, are the Who will finally restore?

Whenever we lose our Confidence about ourselves, we pray. That you would never let us lose. Our certainty about Christ himself. What make us to keep turning to him in his means? Especially word and prayer and sacrament, especially His worship. And with his word on his day. Thank you. That, that is the very thing that you have gathered us for.

Um, on this Lord's Day morning, Uh and we pray that you would help us in the rest of this day to find Our Hope in you. Before we ask it through Christ.