

“When Assurance Falters” □ WCF 18.4.p (TPH p930)

2024.08.04 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

p. Ps. 51:8, 12, 14

8        Make me hear joy and gladness,  
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.  
12       Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,  
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.  
14       Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
The God of my salvation,  
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

Eph. 4:30–31.

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

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."  
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.

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!"

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."  
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](http://hopewellarp.org))

And, So, the fourth article Of Westminster profession 18.

Uh, reads. Thus 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 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.

All right, so we're just the if you have a sheet the top half there with the big bold print, uh is the part that we aim to cover. Um, True Believers may have the Assurance of their salvation divers ways, shaken, diminished and intermitted and then it gives four different ways that that happens.

So True Believers. That means not just those who have made a profession of Faith. Not just those who Agree with true Doctrine. Uh, not just those who said a prayer one day. Uh, but those in whom the Holy Spirit has actually done a resurrecting work, Because we come into this world, uh, which way children do?

We come into this world? Spiritually alive or spiritually dead? We come into this world, spiritually dead. Uh and so there was a book on regeneration. Once and instead of being titled born again, which is the way that I think as frequently used and sometimes not really of regeneration but used to talk about true conversion as a whole That particular book was called finally alive now.

I don't remember the details of the book. So, I'm I'm not necessarily commending it to you but I definitely commend you the title Uh, finally alive. True. Believers are those who were made alive by the spirit given Faith to believe into Christ and you don't just believe in Christ or believe about Christ.

You believe into Christ. Why is that children? Because you become United to Christ, it's like my kids at the pool at the family bottle conference this uh this past week. Um, they become one with the pool for and you know the older I get the grocer that is Um, to be in a pool, with a hundred kids, who have really been united to the pool, And, But, Spending time with my children and splicing around and Um, trusting God's Sovereign power to preserve my physical life.

Um, it's all worth it and you believe into Christ Christ becomes yours. You become his, you abide in him. He abides in you. Like, we hope to hear in the afternoon, uh, preaching today. True Believers. And when you think about all that, we've heard about Assurance of Faith about the that further work of the spirit who uh, who brings us to a place where we're not just convinced about Jesus.

But the spirit actually convinces about ourselves us about ourselves that we are in Jesus and one of our wonderful gift that is and what a useful and helpful gift that is maybe you would be surprised to learn That True Believers may have that Assurance. Shaken. That there would be moments.

They wouldn't be sure that they belonged to Christ. They're so sure that Christ saves, they're so sure that those who belong to Christ are saved But just for a moment. They have. A flash. A worry. A horrible realization about themselves and the remaining sin. Something comes in their circumstances and they're forgetful of all that the Bible tells us about how difficult the circumstances of Christians get like, we hope to hear in the morning uh preaching today.

And they they wonder wait a minute. Am I not actually? And sometimes it's not just a moment. Sometimes it's a sag. Where their assurances diminished your Assurance is something that can be. That can be strengthened. It can be strong and hot like the Like the Noonday sun and high altitude sunburning.

People who don't ordinarily, get sunburned. And sometimes it's it's like the the dawn sunlight it is. It is there. Uh, but the sun hasn't risen yet. You can see by it, you know, it But it's just not dominating. Your life at the time. And sometimes it's not just shaken or diminished.

Sometimes it's even intermittent. What do you think? Intermittent means

Well. Um, Y'all probably don't go to films and I don't think films are long enough to have intermissions. Y'all probably are more likely to go to multi-act place. Or operas. You, is there any? What is something that you all have attended that had an intermission? The ballet recital had an intermission.

Okay, so Uh, remind me to tell you about the pause button. Uh, that's something else. Some of you already know. Um, but Um, You can have as it were an intermission. In your Assurance. Or you were a sword. Um, and you will. Again, eventually be assured as we see.

Um, And, In the smaller part of article 4, the lowercase, or the smaller font part that I've got at the bottom there. Um, Out of which by the operation of the spirit, this Assurance May and due time be revived But as you can imagine, Uh, if you lack Assurance, or if you had insurance and then you come into a season in which it's intermittent that can be quite Uh, hard on the Christian.

Because if you had it before, And you can remember. What it felt like to have Assurance of Faith, to be sure that you belong to Christ. And then something happens in you, or in your circumstances. And you no longer have that Assurance. What do you then and during that intermission?

What do you think you start to wonder and think and conclude about the assurance that you did have? You start to wonder and think and conclude that it was the false Assurance. That we were that we were reading and studying about from the scripture by use of the, the first article Uh, in Westminster Confession 18 and that is very Uh, that is very disturbing.

Uh, there's a man named William Cooper. It's spelled like cowper c-o-w-p-e-r. Was a A very good friend of John Newton. In fact, many of Newton's, hymns, and Cooper's hymns, that you have in your Hymnal are the result of his friend John's therapy for him because he lost his sense of assurance.

And, and because he lost a sense of assurance. Thought that his prior Assurance was false. And he became extremely convinced that he was reprobate, not elect that he was condemned. Uh, and yet he never stopped clinging to Christ looking. Looking for the restoration of his, hope in Christ and songs.

Uh, Uh, those I'm trying to think of Anyway, they they fly from me. I'm sure there's a half a dozen in the Trinity Salter Hymnal that you can look up. But what? What Newton? And Had a head. Cooper agree to do was they they would write some scripture gospel song.

Uh, once a week and exchange And so, every every week they would exchange and they would write a new one and they would look at their Look at their, their brothers and To mine now. I don't think. Uh, I think the way that the story ends is if Cooper That he was an unbeliever when he went to his grave.

Uh, which praise God if our hearts condemn Christ is greater than our hearts. Uh, he knows the truth about us, even Uh, if we don't Um, so this is actually A very serious and difficult thing. That can happen to a Christian. And it can happen in diverse ways. Now, the word diverse is not a typo.

It doesn't mean differing. Uh, it's an old word, that means several or many. It includes the idea of differing but the idea is multiple Uh so it's a good word. We've lost lots of good words. Language has devolved, but one of the great helps then, in Westminster Confession 184 is that you hear About this genuine thing that happens to Believers that we read about in scripture where those who are quite sure of belonging to Christ lose their certainty.

Of belonging to him. And it gives us. Four ways that this happens. Uh, at least two of which are preventable. And the other two of which if, you know, That they are ways that it does happen. Then when you come into a season like that you may be encouraged.

You can know, for instance, if If you have a medical condition and you're going to be in circumstances that might threaten to, To make it worse or to trigger. Uh, something life-threatening or extremely painful, then you can plan ahead of time. And then when you're in the midst of those circumstances, you can do all the things.

And praise God. All the things when you're a Christian is really just one thing. God himself that breaks down into all the things, the means of his grace. You know, which are not the The training merely a training manual or a sustaining manual. For the Christian they are the here is how God gives me fellowship with himself and the means by which he He works in my life, so reading the Bible.

Is is not just like working out, it is depending upon God. And looking to him to give you fellowship with himself and to work in him. I hope you children who don't read yet. Are very eager to either to start your schooling if you haven't started yet, but eager and diligent, especially Uh in learning reading uh because there is very little in this world that is going to be more valuable to you.

Than being able to read the very words of God. By which, he gives you fellowship with himself by which his Spirit Works in you. So, the Uh, the four different ways than that Assurance. Comes to be shaken. At least the four that are listed here. The first is by negligence in preserving of it.

Uh, now we need Uh, to know some context, I only gave you the particular verses. That the That the divines. Uh, the pastors at the Westminster assembly added, when Parliament asked for proof texts. Uh, so 50 uh Psalm 51 verse 8 and 12 and 14. But what is the background?

Excuse me. What is the background to Psalm 51. If you got your Bible open, you can see the superscript not, you know, a prayer of repentance, which, you know someone in Nashville invented in the 80s. Um, but whether where it starts to the chief musician, Which was written. As a man was carried Along by the Holy Spirit, and as part of the Hebrew Bible, that's verse 1 in the Hebrew.

What does it tell you? There is the occasion for Psalm 51. Nathan, that probably came to David about him when she was. Okay. So when Uh, when David was confronted by Nathan,

What we're expected to know as far as negligence in the preserving of it. Is how it was. That David? Came to commit, such a sin. And to need his Assurance restored. Like Psalm 51 is asking for. This is, this is David who wrote many of the Psalms that we have while he was being chased by Saul long before he had become king.

This is David, whose heart was so tender to God. That when he cut off the corner of Saul's robe in the cave, His heart smote him. So, you have someone who Knows God trusts and God loves God obeys. God has a tender conscience. If Maybe like some of you children.

I hope if you've ever Uh talk back to your mom or raised your voice to one of your siblings or um, taking something that wasn't yours. You've almost immediately. Put it back and ask for forgiveness or ask Mommy, uh, to forgive you or Ask your sibling to forgive, you, ask God, first of all to forgive you, what a tender heart.

David had But then there came a day. Do you remember how the incident with Bathsheba had? It was that time of year. Yes, it's that time of year when the Kings go out to war but David Was in his Palace. And then he rose from his bed in the middle of the afternoon.

And then he saw something that he should not. Uh, have permitted himself to see but he continued gazing. And then he inquired. About how he might commit some sin. And was warned by his advisors. That it was sinful and did it anyway. David did not go from. His heart smote him.

When he committed a. Um, A very understandable, but still inexcusable sin. To that level of dullness and hardness of conscience. Um, Except by. Neglect in the preserving. Of his life as interaction between him and the Lord. If he was maintaining His fellowship with God in the walking of his life.

Then, as soon as he was tempted to let let joab do it. Which job knew what was going on because when they were about ready to to win the victory, he sent word back and said, better get out here so that you can get the victory. But if he was, if he had maintained his walking with the Lord and a tender conscience before God, Um, You would not have ultimately fallen into the special sin.

Uh, which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the spirit. But we're especially going to see that in Ephesians 4, 30, and we may be a little bit, shocked or 31, gives the special sins. Um, we may be a little shocked, what those special sins are and wonder if any of us should have Assurance.

So in, in the first place, Neglect in the preserving. Of our Assurance Assurance. Um, does not make us immune To becoming spiritually, lazy. Uh to getting to the place where you're just going through the motions in your Bible reading. You're just forming. Theological sounding requesty sentences. When you pray, Um, rather than Seeking to hear God.

Uh, and body his word. That you treat the Bible as the words of his mouth like we hope to hear in the morning sermon today. Um, when you read and having interaction with him in the word, And then when you pray actually lifting your hearts to him, And making the actual desires of your heart, known to God as formed by the nothing wrong with studied prayer.

Or even prepared prayer. But there's definitely something wrong with merely repeated prayer. In prayer. That is not expressing the desire. And then, even Even worse. You know, maybe there are many people I don't pray that way. Because I don't pray at all. Um, That is that is the recipe.

For the loss of assurance. And especially for the falling into some special sin. Which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the spirit. Now if the spirit is the one

Well, I guess I'll I'll come back to it. Uh, if the spirit is the one he gives us Assurance and he is the one who helps us. He applies Christ to us.

Ephesians 4:30 says, do not grieve the holy spirit of God. It is not just saying see how much the spirit loves you. And desires your joy. Should you not also? Love the spirit, who loves you. Uh, and not want to displease him. Uh, in the context, the spirit is the one in whom.

In whom we have all of our spiritual life. He's the one who applies Christ to us. He's the one by whom, the father and the son come, and make their home with us. He's the one who makes us to see the scripture as true. When you grieve the Holy Spirit, you are You.

Uh, cutting off or attacking. The source of all of your spiritual life. Uh, and so He says. And do not grieve the holy spirit of God. By whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. He's reminding He is to. Uh, Uh, that Oh, what was the word Earnest?

That earnest money that deposit? Um, That we have been given as a seal. Onto the unto the day of redemption and then he then he gives a list. Of the sorts of sins. That grieve the spirit. The sorts of sins that you can expect. That you should expect. To shake or diminish or intermit.

Your Assurance of Bitterness. Wrath. Of course, not righteous anger. Although Almost all of our anger is, well actually, all of our anger is going to have a fleshly component as well. Even when we do have righteous anger, there is some unrighteous with it and much of what we would convince ourselves is righteous anger doesn't actually have any righteous anger in it.

We're just theologically skilled enough to excuse how we feel. Um, and so the wrath of man that rising reflexive hotness. Uh, that is because something offends us not so much. Because it offends God. Wrath anger. Um, clamor

You know, when you start Uh, raising your voices to one another. Like, Maybe your children, you're in a room, playing a game or something. And someone thinks the other one cheated And the voices start to get louder and angrier. Uh, that loudness and that anger, and that clamor. And suddenly appearance in the room.

What's going on here? Clamor. Evil speaking.

Yes, sir. The way you described David's resulting in his adultery being preceded by the state. This buildup, it just automatically can following this section of Ephesians is very similar. Actually because before this it had it has lines like do not let the sun go down in your wrath or give place to double.

Similar ideas. Like you could just imagine baby letting assistance between God and his hearts, where God gets cold over colder and colder and older and then it culminates in It's really the Holy Spirit is real distance from the Holy Spirit. And, Yeah, if if you go back to where you were, 26 and 27.

Uh, not maintaining repentance verse 28.

Uh, in the repentance sorry you don't all have Bibles often. Let him who stole a steel no longer. Okay, so what he was like, such were some of you and whatever it was that you were, is the primary place for your repentance. Like, the people who came and asked, uh, John the baptizer, Um, but then not just Extinguishing.

Former habits of sin that came from your old nature but cultivating new habits of righteousness, so not just not stealing anymore. But now let him labor working with his hands. What is good? Even affects what kind of job you would choose? Something that Productive and beneficial to others. But also that he may have and not for himself that, he may have something to give him, who has need.

Okay, so So not maintaining that life of repentance with the extinguishing of sin and mortification and the cultivating of godliness in vivification and then he goes from Uh, verse 29. Not letting one corrupt word proceed out of your mouth. Okay, so watching every word and having a you know having like a security check where they check the the check, the idea ID, you know, corrupter edifying, you know, you know corrupt you get ding and the green light edifying and the Red X and it's not allowed to come out.

Not letting a corrupt word come out of your mouth. But what is neces? Good for necessary? Edification that it may impart race to the hearers but if you if you lose the The Moment by moment walking with God killing sin, cultivating righteousness, watching every word that comes out of your mouth pretty soon.

You end up with evil speaking. Verse 31. You're saying that which itself is evil about God, probably here in the context. Speaking ill of. Uh, your brothers or sisters. Uh, but we know from scripture evil speaking, even includes Idle words. Which Jesus says will have to give an answer for.

And so a word that just as it isn't necessary. Uh, becomes a form of corruption, because it's not what our words were designed for. It's not what God gave us speech to do. And then just give a speech to run a run at the mouth. Uh, like someone with verbal incontinence.

He gave us speech to edify to speak that, which is necessary. If you're familiar with the think before you speak. Acronym, you know, the As is for necessary. Um, let all those be put away from you with all malice. So even that inclination of your heart against someone Which is so easy to develop.

If you are not continually maintaining a heart of love to God, love to the Brethren. Love to the neighbor and even love to your enemy. Um, Disposition of your heart against someone where you would be pleased. Buy something ill happening to them. That's the, that's the idea of Of malice.

Those are the kinds of sins that grieve the spirit. And if we are committing them or regularly, indulging them, Um, in the first place we must wonder. Whether? The Assurance. We thought we had as true assurance or false And then, If we have Assurance. Uh, we certainly want to guard against such sins, that grieve the spirit, who is the one who gives us and continues to us our Assurance.

And if you've lost Assurance Then sins like this are sins that you want to take in inventory of And see if you are in them. I don't like to use words like terrible twos. There's terrible Defiance and Rebellion against your parents, there's no law that a Christian two-year-old has to go through that stage.

Or teenager in which you decide that everyone within 17 months of your birth date. As your family and your family, family are the ones, you go to bed near and wake up near Um, doesn't have to be like that. Um, But also, Sorry, I lost Lost track of.

That's where I was going sibling rivalry. Sibling rivalry is just. A Bible unaware word. For malice. And climber. In which you want your place ahead of your brothers or sisters. And so you'll be well, pleased, if they get diminished or something bad happens to them. That will. Uh if you lack assurance and you have quote, unquote sibling rivalry and it doesn't necessarily go away, there are people in their 40s and 50s that still have um, malice AKA sibling.



Rivalry. And then, of course verse 31 isn't an exhaustive list. But if you've lost your Assurance, you want to take inventory and repent of those things. Um, We're about out of time.

I think we'll stop there. The other two Southerner vehement Temptation or Gods. Withdrawing the light of his countenance. Are things that don't necessarily. Um, Include our sinning, although the examples they gave of Peter, he did fall into that Temptation. Um, But a Believer. Who has the sudden Temptation rise from Is remaining flesh or even a suggestion?

Um, from a demon, a demon campus, that's you. But certainly demons can suggest things to you, Satan was able. To suggest things to Christ. I don't know where the idea came from that. Um, Christians can never experience. Uh, demonic suggestion or anything like that. Um, but those are things outside of us, and our circumstances.

At the first and Uh, we'll take some more time. To consider them next week. Lord willing. It's Brian. Our Father in heaven. We thank you for the good gift. Of assurance of We thank you for your spirit and his love for us. And his work in. We ask that you would give us a Uh, continuing and increasing awareness.

Of his ministry to us, that we would not take him for granted. And that we would be very unwilling to grieve him. Who gives us such a good thing as Assurance of faith and Lord that, which you Have given to be so valuable, make us to Value it as well.

So that we will want to increase and strengthen it by. The means you have given so that we will be wary. Of. The neglect. Or the. The sorts of sin. By which it can be shaken or diminished or even intermittent. Give us to Value your good gifts. And most of all to Value.

You now, come we pray and help us In your worship. Grant that we would. As it were enter. Through a new and lived through the new and living way that is the Flesh of your son. Even now as we have considered some things that might be Convicting to us.

Grant that his blood would sprinkle our hearts clean. From an evil conscience. And that we might come embracing once again full and free forgiveness from Jesus. And the certainty that none who come to you through him and in him, Will be cast out. Grant that we ask in his name, amen.