

The 1689 Confession of Faith, Chapter 18 – “Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation”,
Session # 15 – “Assurance May Be Shaken”, presented by
Pastor Paul Rendall on September 23rd, 2018,
in the Adult Sunday School.

Paragraph 4 – “True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as (*n*) by negligence in preserving of it, by (*o*) falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or (*p*) vehement temptation, by God's withdrawing the (*q*) light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light, yet are they never destitute of the (*r*) seed of God and life (*s*) 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 (*t*) revived, and by the which, in the meantime, they are (*u*) preserved from utter despair.”

n) Song 5:2-3,6; *o*) Psalm 51: 8,12,14; *p*) Psalm 116: 11; 77:7-8; 31:22; *q*) Psalm 30:7; *r*) 1st John 3:9; *s*) Luke 22:32; *t*) Psalm 42: 5 and 11; *u*) Lamentations 3: 26-31

A Shorter Definition of Assurance:

Assurance of salvation is the right conclusion that you come to, concerning your state before God, based on the truth of the Scriptures, that your faith in Christ is genuine, and that you have eternal life.

The first phrase of this paragraph says that true believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers way shaken. The word “divers” means “in a number of different ways” they could have their faith shaken. It does not say that a true believer could have the assurance of their salvation completely destroyed. But it could be shaken for a time. The length of that shaking could be for a short time or a longer time depending upon the person and their particular and peculiar situation. This possibility of the true believer's assurance of salvation being shaken, does not happen to all believers, or in all believers alike, whose assurance is shaken. But the possibility should be acknowledged by all believers as we find examples of it in the word of God.

The Question that I want to pose to you this morning is this – How is it, then, that when Christ's work is so sure; His having accomplishing everything necessary for our redemption, and the Father and He have given the Spirit to indwell the believer, and apply the benefits of salvation most surely to each one who believes; and then there is also a definite witness with the believer's spirit that they are a child of God; how is it, then, that a Christian's assurance can be shaken, diminished, and intermitted in various ways?

3 Reasons are given to us here in Paragraph 4.

1st Reason – Negligence in Preserving our Assurance.

Hebrews 2, verses 1-3a – “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.” “For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”

Now, we must ask ourselves who it is that the apostle Paul is writing to in this letter? It is to Hebrew believers. It was to those who truly had believed in Christ; people who might neglect such a great salvation and harm their own progress in sanctification. And also he was also writing to some who professed to believe and yet they were neglecting so great a salvation as they had supposedly received it, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. You will say to me – If Paul was writing to true believers, is he saying that a true believer in Christ can lose their salvation? Absolutely not! But what he is saying, by the way that he wrote these things, is that true believers need to be warned of neglecting so great a salvation, just as much as professed believers who have never been born again.

Both categories of people must be warned, and warned for different reasons. Those who are professing to be saved, but really unbelieving, will truly neglect such a great salvation which is found only in the gospel of Christ to their own harm and eternal destruction. They will never be able to have true assurance of salvation. And those who are really saved, and have been born again of the Spirit of God, must take heed to themselves not to neglect so great a salvation by falling into listening to deceitful reasonings of their own heart, because of the strength of indwelling remaining corruption within them. If they fall into thinking that they can be lazy, or indifferent, careless or neglectful in holding fast to the truths of the gospel and the good and sound doctrine and teaching of the word of God, they can dishonor God and their assurance of salvation will be shaken.

For how shall we conclude that we are a true Christian when we are walking in neglect of holding fast the truth and our pursuing righteousness in living our life to Christ? Indeed, we cannot live our life to Christ by neglecting fellowship with Him in this all important way.

Therefore we are to take heed to ourselves –

Hebrews 3: 12-15 – “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today’, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” “For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’”

Notice how Paul addresses them as brethren, not as unbelievers. Therefore we need to take notice of the fact an evil heart of unbelief, although it cannot be found to ultimately prevail over the true Christian because God’s work in preserving and keeping them is sure, still unbelief may lead that person astray, and they can become hardened for a time by the deceitfulness of sin, which will most certainly result in their being shaken in regard to their assurance during that time, because the Holy Spirit will cause them to understand his displeasure with them by letting them feel and know their spiritual danger. They are not steadfastly abiding in Christ or in God’s word and fellowship with God. The reason is the deceitfulness of sin, and specifically the sin of unbelief. The unbelief that God is watching and evaluating me, the believer. The unbelief of thinking that it really does not matter if I do not obey God’s commandments fully. The unbelief of thinking that it does not really matter if I as a Christian am involved in worldliness, or pride, or sensuality, or see myself as self-sufficient, so that I neglect prayer and the fellowship with Christ that will lead me to further obedience and complete obedience.

When a true Christian falls into this kind of sinful compromising thinking, this does not mean that they cannot for a time, be so deceived that they will still try and attempt in every way to be confident and self-assured during this time of deception. But it will be of no avail when the Holy Spirit shows them their disobedience and unfaithfulness, which He can and does do, when He sovereignly chooses. Neglect in dealing with heart sins and heart wanderings will lead to that person’s assurance being shaken, and rightfully so.

Listen to John Gill on verse 12: “Take heed, brethren,... This exhortation is grounded upon the state and case of their ancestors before given, as a warning and caution to the then present Hebrews; and whom the apostle styles “brethren”, to show that he had no hard thoughts of them, and that his jealousy was a godly one, and not an evil suspicion; and may teach us that all exhortations, admonitions, and reproofs should be given in love:

lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief; or such an evil heart, in which unbelief prevails, and is predominant: there is in every man, whether a profane sinner, or an hypocritical professor, an evil heart, and an unbelieving one; and there is unbelief in regenerate persons, which when cherished and encouraged by them is a great evil, and should be avoided; and this sin is aggravated by the many instances of God’s grace, and by the many declarations of it, and by the exceeding great and precious promises God has made, and by the great discoveries of his love to their souls in times past: and this sin, when it gets ahead, has a very great influence on the heart, to make it evil; and unbelief was the first sin of man, at least it

very early appeared; it is the mother sin, and puts persons upon every sin; it defiles the conscience, hardens the heart, renders the word unprofitable, unfit for duty and makes men unstable, and therefore to be shunned; and especially because of the dreadful effect following: in departing from the living God; that is, from Christ, who is the Son over his own house, and whose voice is to be heard; for of no other is the apostle speaking in the context; and who is not only the Son of the living God, but he is himself the living God; he is life in himself, and is the fountain and author of life, natural, spiritual, and eternal.”

“This is mentioned to exalt the person of Christ, the apostle and high priest of our profession; and to discover the greatness and heinousness of the sin of such as depart from him and his Gospel, and to deter men from it: there is a final and total departure from Christ, from his Gospel and ordinances, from his people, and from a former profession of faith, which is never to be found in true believers; for they are as Mount Zion, which can never be removed; but there is a partial departure, and for a while, which they are liable to, and is attended with bad effects to them, and should be guarded against: saints should take heed of themselves, and of their hearts, and of the unbelief of them, that they do not in the least depart from Christ, by letting go their hold of him, or by a non-exercise of faith upon him; and this should be the care and concern of every individual member of the church, and at all times; unbelief is very dishonourable to God and Christ; contradicts the word and promises of God; is uncomfortable to the saints; it is a sin that very easily besets, and is very provoking to God, and is highly resented by him.” (end of quote)