

The 1689 Confession of Faith, Chapter 18 – “Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation”,
Session # 18 – “Assurance Being Revived”, presented by
Pastor Paul Rendall on October 21st, 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.

We have seen thus far that assurance of salvation may be shaken in a number of ways. First, by negligence in preserving of it. 2nd – by falling into some special sin which wounds the conscience and grieves the Spirit. 3rd – By some vehement temptation. And now 4th – I would like to consider with you the experience which is most difficult for any saint – When God withdraws the light of His countenance, and suffers even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light. You might say to me – How can this be? The Bible clearly says in a number of places that God never leaves nor forsakes His saints. How could such as truly fear God walk in darkness and have no light? Well, we should understand the second part of that sentence in our Confession is true as well. It says – “They are never destitute of the 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. In other words – God is faithful never to leave nor forsake His own; those who fear Him, those who He has begun a good work in. And even though He has many things to teach His saints experientially and particularly about what it means to be godly and to be loving, He will for holy and wise purposes, permit them to walk through dark and difficult paths, to accomplish every good purpose which He has towards them. And, we need to understand that when God leads His people through these experiences, that His love is unailing and sure, for them. And the salvation of His elect, those whom He loves with an everlasting love, is never in question. But He would have us to learn to walk with Him and learn from Him in very practical ways, what it means to be conformed to the image of His dear Son. That is His ultimate purpose.

So, with the time that I have, I want to take you back to the experience of the prophet Jeremiah; the things that he thought and felt, and agonized over; things which shook his assurance, but in the end we will find that his assurance was revived and strengthened because he was indeed one of God’s true children. I want you to turn over to the book of Lamentations chapter 3, and we will be looking at this passage in two sections. The first will be –

Lamentations 3: 1-18 – It is the prophet Jeremiah speaking here in these verses – “I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.” “He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light.” “Surely He has turned His hand against me time and time again throughout the day.” “He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones.” “He has besieged me And surrounded me with bitterness and woe.” “He has set me in dark places like the dead of long ago.” “He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy.” “Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer.” “He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked. He has been to me a bear lying in wait, Like a lion in ambush.” “He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces; He has made me desolate.” “He has bent His bow and set me up as a target for the arrow.” “He has caused the arrows of His quiver To pierce my loins.” “I have become the ridicule of all my people – Their taunting song all the day.” “He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drink wormwood.” “He has also broken my teeth with gravel, and covered me with ashes.” “You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity.” “And I said, ‘My strength and my hope have perished from the LORD.’”

Now, you can see here that Jeremiah lived in the terrible days when God’s judgments were coming upon the nation of Israel for their many sins. These sins of idolatry and dishonoring the Lord, these sins of not listening to this prophet and many other prophets, of not repenting of their many sins over a number of generations, had brought them to this place. By the way – Sometimes I think that people do not think that this could happen to our own dear country, but brethren, if we do not repent of our many sins and see national revival which would lead many to repentance, we should not be surprised if heavier judgments come our own land, and these may lead to our downfall. God is faithful in justice, just as much as He is good and patient. But God will not let national sins go on forever. He will bring His judgments.

Next, we need to see that Jeremiah was a faithful God-fearing man, but even faithful God-fearing men may be called to experience and feel the effects of the Lord’s judgments upon unbelieving people, because they live in the same nation with them. Godly people may be brought into an experience of spiritual darkness as a result of not at all being able to sense the Lord’s lovingkindness since they are not able to perceive His common grace at work in the lives of people around them. As you read the first two chapters of this book you see that in his prayers that Jeremiah identified himself with the sinful people of the nation in his prophesying. For instance in chapter 1, verse 18, he says, “The Lord is righteous, for I rebelled against His commandment.” “Hear now, all peoples, and behold my sorrow; my virgins and young men have gone into captivity.” In verse 13 of that same chapter he says – “From above He has sent fire into my bones, and it overpowered them; He has spread a net for my feet and turned me back; He has made me desolate and faint all the day.” This was the common experience of the godly in those days in Jerusalem, but especially Jeremiah.

So by the time we get to chapter 3 we find Jeremiah saying that he was the man who had seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.” “He has led me and made walk in darkness and not in light.” This was his experience. God had aged his flesh and his skin and broken the bones of his emotional strength. He pictures God as One who was besieging him and setting him in dark places like the dead of long ago. You will say to me – Deliver me from any such experience! And certainly I pray that none of us ever has to go through an experience like this. His words in verse 10-12 show us that in his experience that God had been to him as a bear lying in wait and like a lion in ambush against him. In his experience he felt as though he was being torn in pieces. He uses many such descriptions as this in verse 13-16, and then in verses 17 and 18 he says – “You

have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity.” “And I said, ‘My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord.’ Now, all of this did affect Jeremiah’s assurance at points. And so he does the right thing and he prays to Lord in verse 19 and says – “Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood and the gall.” “My soul still remembers and sinks within me.” So there you have it. There is assurance shaken, and the prophet Jeremiah experiencing the withdrawing of the light of his countenance from him, and suffering him as to walk in darkness and to have no light for a time.

But we cannot stop here. We must consider the verses that follow which were the means that Jeremiah used to see his assurance revived.

Lamentations 3: 21-41 – “This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope.” “Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.” “They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.” “The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I hope in Him!’” The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.” “It is good for a man to bear The yoke in his youth.” “Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him; let him put his mouth in the dust – There may yet be hope.” “Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, and be full of reproach.” “For the Lord will not cast off forever.” “Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.” “For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” “To crush under one’s feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the justice due a man before the face of the Most High, or subvert a man in his cause – The Lord does not approve.” “Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, when the Lord has not commanded it?” “Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed?” “Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?” “Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the LORD; let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven.”

This is how assurance is revived; through prayer and in that prayer recalling and reminding ourselves that it is through the Lord mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. His compassions are new every morning and great is His faithfulness.

And then, we must remind ourselves that the Lord Himself is our portion. And so, it is good to hope in him and to wait quietly wait for Him to act on our behalf to bring deliverance and salvation from all that has come upon us. It is good to do this. It is good to bear this kind of a yoke, even if we are a youth. If we give our cheek to be smited by a righteous rebuke, and we are full of reproach, if we put our mouth in the dust, let us remind ourselves that there yet may be hope. Remember his promise to His people. The Lord will not cast off forever. For though He cause grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. Is it not a strengthening reviving thought that with the Lord there is a multitude of mercies to be bestowed upon His people?

And last, remember that the Lord does not afflict willingly; that is to grieve. He is a loving Father who does not want to see His children grieved and sad. To see His people being crushed or subverted in their just cause – of this the Lord does not approve. If there have been sins, let us confess them and forsake them. Let us remember that He is well able to deliver our lives from all distress and place us before His presence with great joy.

