

“The Means of Assurance” □ WCF 18.3l (TPH p930)

2024.07.07 Sabbath School Lesson

Hopewell ARPC, Culleoka, TN

1. Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favor of God, and estate of salvation (which hope of theirs shall perish): yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.

2. This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God, which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.

3. This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it; yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto. And therefore it is the duty of everyone to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance; so far is it from inclining men to looseness.

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; and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair.

Hebrews 6:9–12 9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have

shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

- Though the warning is given concerning specific individuals in the church, there is a general confidence of “things that accompany salvation” about the visible church taken as a whole.
- Still, it is the duty of “each one” to “show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope.”
- Assurance is given, in part, through diligent effort; we ought not to expect it apart from that effort (which effort, itself, we will all admit in retrospect had been given by God—which is part of how it functions unto our assurance!). In the context of the book of Hebrews, that effort is especially keeping the Lord’s Day by not forsaking the assembling, and conscientious attendance upon all those means by which we come to God through Christ, Who is our Priest and Sacrifice—together with that love and good deeds to which this stirs us up
- This is “until the end.” Assurance is something that must be maintained, and spiritual sluggishness should alarm us. Faith and assurance do not present as complacency and presumption but as imitation of “those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Ephesians 3:14–19 14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

- The proof text is especially v17–18: a rooting and grounding in knowing the electing/saving love of Christ toward us.
- Prayer (such as this one) is one of those ordinary means that we ought rightly to use in pursuit of assurance.
- It takes divine strength to know the divine love. This is a work of the Spirit.
m. 2Pet. 1:10. ▪ n. Rom. 5:1–2, 5. Rom. 14:17. Rom. 15:13. Eph. 1:3–4. Ps. 4:6–7. Ps. 119:32. ▪ o. 1John 2:1–2. Rom. 6:1–2. Titus 2:11–12, 14. 2Cor. 7:1. Rom. 8:1, 12. 1John 3:2–3. Ps. 130:4. 1John 1:6–7. ▪ p. Ps. 51:8, 12, 14. Eph. 4:30–

31. Ps. 77:1–10. Ps. 31:22. Matt. 26:69–72. Luke 22:31–34. ■ 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, I think we'll just Read. Chapter so far. In the confession. And then, we'll Highlight the portion that We are. Continuing to consider. This morning. And then, we'll jump into. Uh, the scriptures that Teach that portion. So on the insurance of Faith, the confession of faith says, although Hypocrites and other unregenerate men Um, not yet born again, men.

May vainly deceive themselves emptily. Deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions. That is uh, fleshly self-assurances. Of being in the favor of God and a state of salvation. Which hope of theirs shall perish. So although it is possible that unbelievers Um, Unregenerate. I can tell themselves and feel sure that they are saved, that hope will perish If they're unbelievers.

Such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus. And love him in sincerity. Endeavoring to walk in all good conscience. Before him. So, that's just those who are in a state of salvation. They've been justified made righteous with God through faith in Christ. They've been given a new life. They've been consecrated on unto God or live their life in fellowship with Jesus as holy unto the Lord.

Which we hope is the case for each one of you. They may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace. So not only is it possible to be in the State of Grace, it's possible to know that you are. A state of Grace and may rejoice in the Of the glory of God, which hope shall never make then ashamed.

So, when the believer knows that he is in the state of grace and he rejoices over that, and By May by means of that certainty, this is a hope that will not be put to shame. Article 2. This certainty is not a bear conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope.

But an infallible Assurance of Founded upon the Divine truth of the promises of Salvation. So God Saves God promised God accomplishes it. The Bible teaches us that. And uh, when we have Assurance, our hope is in him and his promises. The inward evidence of those Graces unto which these promises were made.

So it's not the inward evidence of achievements, but the inward evidence of Grace is again, when we look at the evidence in our hearts and in our lives, this This is a means of assurance, not because we have achieved, what makes us sure. But because those things that we see, could only be the work of God and we're sure about him.

In the work that he is doing. The testimony of the spirit of adoption. Witnessing with our Spirits that we are the children of God. And so the ministry of the Holy Spirit who is the one who gave us both. The scripture truth promises and is the one who has done the work in our hearts applying Christ to us.

And so, he personally ministers to us There's a personal relational work of the Holy Spirit who has done both of these things. Witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God. Which spirit is the earnest of her of our inheritance? Whereby, we are sealed to the day of redemption.

So, the Holy Spirit doing this doesn't just assure us on account of What he does in us and the effect that that has, uh, upon us and how he relates to us. But even the fact that we have him is a gift from God that is only given to Believers and Is an initial portion.

Of that blessedness that we come into at the resurrection. All right, article three and this is the one that we're on. So we're going to breed uh about halfway through uh since that's where we are. Um, Coming to this Lord's day. This infallible assurance does doth not so belong to the essence of But that a True Believer may wait long.

And conflict with many difficulties. Before he be partaker of it. Okay, so, the essence of faith is not certainty about oneself that he is in a state of grace. The essence of faith is certainty about Jesus that he is a savior And that he is gracious to Sinners. And so there is that certainty.

That is of the essence of faith for which reason we rest entirely upon him. But as this resting upon him, comes almost always. Perhaps, we can say, always, we want to be Careful using Um, Uh, exclusive or superlative statements in theology comes Yes, there's certainty about. Jesus comes always with a refusal to trust in oneself and an awareness of one's sinfulness before God.

It is not surprising, then That we would have this certainty about Christ and resting only in Christ, but be unsure about ourselves. And not be certain of ourselves that we are in the state of Grace. So, a True Believer? May wait long and conflict with many difficulties, before he be a partaker of it yet.

Being enabled by the spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God. And that's what we were. Thinking about last week in First Corinthians chapter 2 and first John chapter 4 that it is, especially a work of the Holy Spirit who gives to spiritual people to regenerate.

People not only to know the Glorious thing that God had prepared for us, that the Lord Of Glory would be crucified for us, but that we would also each of us by the Holy Spirit, the hope and desire. And what we're commanded to pursue is to, for each of you to know what has been freely given to you individually by God.

That this also is a Ministry of the spirit. He does not only convinces you of the truth about Jesus. The truth about yourself. And so that is a merciful and Powerful work of the Holy spirit that we considered last week. Then we come this week. Uh, to the means of assurance last week, we considered really The Giver of assurance which is of course the Triune God.

An opera ad extra. Something that got an action that God takes outside of himself. And yet he emphasizes, especially Uh the work of the third person of the godhead, the Holy spirit. So The Giver of assurance this week then the means or instruments. Of assurance. He may, this is the believer May without extraordinary Revelation.

So, You know, you're the a an e for elect does not appear in the fog on the mirror after your shower. Uh, you don't hear. Whispers or yeah, ethereal songs telling you that you're assured. Uh, there's uh, there's no A message from all the self-appointed people in the church who seem to have a word for everyone but themselves.

Um, Without extraordinary Revelation. In the right, use of ordinary means. There unto Now, I think we mentioned before that originally the pastors at the Westminster assembly, uh, did not wish to put proof texts. On the confession because it was really is necessary to know the teaching of the Bible.

As a whole Parliament asked for proof texts and said, they did provide them and we're actually grateful for that because we do not know the teaching of the Bible as a whole As men did. And we don't just mean the pastors at the assembly as much of their congregations.

Did we cry out to God for reformation and Revival? In each of our lives and our homes, in this church. And all of the churches that we make, But very helpful, then when you think about the right, use of ordinary means and the need of assurance. That they would give us a proof text from the book of Hebrews.

Uh we've noted several times as we've been studying Assurance that there is at least one book of the Bible. The great point of, which is that we might know. That we have eternal life and knowing that we have eternal life that we might continue to believe. Uh, and that is the book of First John.

The desire to give us Assurance of faith in in Jesus Christ that produces an ongoing diligence is also one of the great themes of the book of Hebrews And very necessarily. So because the book of Hebrews is also marked by what we call the warning passages, There's that warning at the beginning of chapter two of not neglecting such a great salvation as has begun to be proclaimed to us.

There's that warning that Bridges the end of chapter three and into chapter four. Of not being those who go astray in our hearts and don't take heed of the word that is preached to us and therefore, fail to enter God's rest. There's the warning. Uh, that we have here.

That is a warning against a spiritual immaturity. Uh, the end of chapter five, that maybe a marker of not actually being converted at all. In the beginning of chapter six and we'll return to that. There's the warning. Of reverting to ungodly living. At the end of chapter 10, which is one of the consequences of forsaking the assembly.

Uh neglecting uh forsaking to assemble together. And the need not to. Forsake, the assembly together and then there's the warnings. Chapter 12. That those who don't pursue sanctification. Those who Uh, don't pursue. Peace with all men. Those who do allow a root of bitterness to spring up in their hearts.

And don't turn out to be, uh, those who are being preserved by the Lord Jesus's Ministry from Heaven. So, with in a book, full of these very Serious. And they should be at least initially frightening warnings. It is not surprising. That the Lord would also speak to us of assurance and especially pointing us to Jesus's Ministry from Uh, the book of Hebrews is one of the great books in the Bible on what we would call or what we do, call the ordinary means of Grace.

Uh, those means that God has ordained Uh, by which he graciously Works in. And it is the book of Hebrews that tells us that Jesus is the one who presents us in heaven. Jesus, is the one who declares God's name to his Brethren. Jesus is the one who sings God's praise in the midst of the assembly.

And that when we come to God through him, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together in the way in chapter 10 directs us that we actually come to Heavenly Zion where there are the Angels dressed for feast and God our Father and the souls of the just made

perfect and Christ, our mediator And Jesus is preserving us as he prepares us for and prepares for us an unshakable Kingdom.

Uh, and so, all of these things that I think were attempted not attempted, we are tempted, uh, to think of mechanically, you know how prayer works for us, how Bible studies works for us how listening to preaching works for us and God has designed the means in a way that is suitable to their end.

But this is uh this is one of the great books. Hebrews is one of the great books of the Bible For reminding and teaching us, that these things do not work. Merely mechanically Their means by which God himself works. Uh, and so it is trust in him. That uh, that compels Uh to uh, to gather for worship, and to worship only in the way that he has said.

But it's also. Trusting in him that we are doing as we do those things because he must use them all. Uh, he must be the one who is working in the mall. Uh, so our proof text is actually in verses 9 through 12. We're going to start a little bit uh higher.

We'll just start at the beginning of chapter six. In the book of Hebrews. Uh, therefore leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, the basics of the faith, uh let us go on to Perfection Uh, or Uh, maturity not laying. Again, the foundation of repentance from dead Works, wonderful phrase, repenting from any Dependence upon any of our works since you know, they're not just sinful which they are and inadequate, which they are, they're dead, they come from dead people.

What can a man do to prepare for himself himself for salvation if he's dead? Repentance from dead works and of Faith toward God of the doctrine of baptisms. Understanding. Um, not just how the previous Washings have been set aside, but also how The great baptism that saves is the washing by the Holy Spirit, who is bored from heaven and that Jesus has also commanded baptism on Earth with water that we would do his church would do uh to each one whom he adds to the visible church on Earth with the water.

What he does from Heaven. Of laying on of hands, in God's Providence, to us doctrine of ordination appears uh, in Is a teaching in both the morning and evening preaching. Of resurrection of the dead and of Eternal judgment. And this, we will do if God permits Uh, amazing. That we continue to live in an age in which the doctrine of baptisms and the doctrine of ordination Are two things that are widely disagreed about.

Uh, and perhaps In a large part of the church and the larger part of the church misunderstood Incorrectly thought about. And so we ought to cry out to God for his Mercy on his church. Not just that there would be Unity on these doctrines but recognizing that they are basics of the faith according to the scripture itself.

Um, that right teaching would rise up again by God's mercy to us. But he says he's going to leave off of that. There's something more important to attend to. And, Uh, yeah, it's kind of like the beginning. Of the little book of Jude when he says, there's this really important thing that I wanted to tell you about or write to you about, but there's a more important thing.

And the, the more important thing in this case, Is the possibility of being in a true congregation of the visible. But being a false believer. And not yourself individually. Personally, having closed with Christ. Having rested upon him and being united to him by faith. And therefore being in danger, rather than being saved.

Uh, through the means that God has appointed By wrong attending. Attending upon those means in the wrong way, being self-deceived and hardened in a way That cannot be remedied.

Says for it is impossible for those who are once enlightened and have tasted the Heavenly gift. And have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God.

And the powers of the age to come. Okay. So these are people who have understood some Doctrine. And they've had tests of what it is like to be around people. Who have heaven on Earth? Indeed, the Holy Spirit has saved many who are around. Around them and they've gotten a taste of what it's like to be in a congregation where there are those who are regenerate and who are being used of God by Christ by the, the work of Christ's spirit in the other people in the church in one another's lives.

And they have tasted the good word of God. So there's true teaching and preaching happening there. And so, all of these things, Uh, that are being done not by the powers of men. Not because the church has it figured out. And, uh, and the elders theology is spot on and, uh, the preaching is done very skillfully and the people are really nice and, and good and sincere and there's great Community there.

But because God himself is the one Who is producing these things in them. So it's impossible for those. Who once had all of these things? If they fall away. To renew them again to repentance. Since they crucify again for themselves, the son of God. And put him. An open shame.

Okay, so he's talking about those. Who have been hardened? By the ministry of the word. And, As a consequence, they fall away from what they have professed. Then fall away from their membership in the church. They fall away from believing that these things are. Thinking agreeing in their mind.

That these things are real and spiritual that Jesus is God, who became man to save us. That it is. God the Holy Spirit. Who does this work in the church. You can. Uh, you can find uh, all over the Internet, uh, especially among those who think themselves, very highly educated.

People who professed at some point to be Evangelical Christians. But realized, you know, whether it's because there's so much hardship in the world or um, You know, for instance, Darwin himself, I guess that's pre-internet. Uh, it was a personal difficulty in his life. Uh, that that was the occasion for which he ended up rejecting the god of the Bible.

And so, there is this. Um, There is this. Genuine. Possibility. That you be a professing member. Of a true church. And not actually have been saved. Is this for the Earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it and bears herbs or vegetation useful for those by whom.

It is cultivated receives blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and Briars, it is rejected and near to be incursed whose end is to be burned. Well, so he kind of says You know, if you're in a true church. And, Uh, what comes out of you is rejection.

Uh, of biblical Christianity, it's not the church's fault. It's not God's fault. Uh, it shows. Um, it exposes a horrible thing about the seed that was in you Um, Uh, so it's very frightening versus four through eight and immediately he says, but beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation that we speak in this manner, Okay, so he although he gives warnings Considering what might be the case with specific individuals in the church.

He then expresses a general confidence about the church to which he's writing. Of things that accompany salvation. About the visible church or true congregations of the visible church. Taken as a whole. He says for God is not unjust. To forget your work and labor of love. Which you have shown toward his name and that you have ministered to the Saints.

And do minister. Okay, so verse 10, he's saying, you know, don't Suddenly. Um, Uh, suspect, that every good thing that you have done is false. If he says, God is Not unjust to forget what he's saying is, even though your Works have been imperfect, they have been done in Christ.

He, he calls upon the justice of God which of us would call upon the justice of God. To examine. Uh, the things that we have done, And yet don't you walk and pray and sing with the Psalms Deal with me according to my righteousness. What is the only way dear children?

We've mentioned this a couple times. It's been it's been a while. What is the only way? That you would be able to have the courage to come to, God and say, Look at the things that I have done deal with me according to my righteousness. It's not because of how well you did those things.

It's because of, in whom. You did those things. They came through faith in Jesus. They came by the life of Jesus in you. He is the one who gives righteous standing to all who believe in him. If you believe in him, God considers you in relationship to himself to be as righteous as Jesus is.

Because Jesus is your righteousness. And that's where all the good that you do is coming from. So yes. You are not obeying your parents perfectly, but If you are believing in Jesus, you are obeying your parents in the Lord. Which is why the scripture tells you obey your parents in the Lord.

And so he calls upon God's justice. He says, God is Not unjust to forget. And so he's already. Uh, given to us in verse 10, the way righteous works of Believers. Even come about but how they factor into Assurance of And notice, then how he goes from generally about the congregation that he's writing to you, in verses, 9 and 10 to specifically.

Verse 11 and we desire that each one of you show the same diligence. To the full Assurance of Okay, so This is something he's he's confident of generally about the church that he's writing to. But if you are going to be sure of better things concerning yourself, if you are going to be sure about yourself about things, accompanying salvation, if you are going to be sure that the justice of God, Is preserving, you Then that requires diligence.

We desire that each one of you show the same diligence. To the full Assurance of Hope Until the End. So same thing that we are going to see And I believe it's second Peter chapter one, uh, that you be diligent to make your calling an election. Sure. So he's telling us here is that there is not Assurance without diligence.

And so this doesn't come by some extraordinary. Revelation. Some new special Revelation. It comes by diligence in the right. Use of ordinary means, and this is something that That has to be maintained. He says diligence. To the full Assurance of Hope Until the End. That you do not become sluggish.

But imitate those who through faith. And patience. Inherit the promises. So Assurance is given in part. Through diligent effort. And the things that he is, instructing In the book of Hebrews. So, If you're not going to church, And if you're not giving your heart up to the Lord in submission to his word as it's preached, And if you're not singing the songs in church, God's Own songs in the church as a depending upon Jesus, who sings through us and admonishes, each of us through everyone else in the church.

And if you're not seeking to stir one another up to love and good deeds like chapter 10, says and then And then going out every week from the Lord's day and the Lord's Day assembly to

do those uh, that love. And that, that good those good deeds uh, to which we have been stirring one another up.

You should not expect a genuine biblical Assurance of Is something that God the Holy spirit gives. But he gives it through means that he has appointed. And he commands us to diligence in the use of those means, And so, I hope each of you desires Assurance of Faith in the very little first.

John passage that we have. In the reading in the worship service that we're about to go to, he gives us one of the uh one of the great benefits of Assurance of Faith knowing that God is listening to you. And you pray, Not just that God is going to do.

All the things that you pray, according to his will praise God. He will, he was already going to do everything. That was according to his will anyway, but he's going to do it in response to what you pray, but one of the benefits of Assurance of Faith. What it does to your prayer life.

In making, you know that God is listening to you, he has regard for you. You're having Fellowship with the one who created you, when you pray, If you don't have Assurance of You don't know that for sure about yourself. You know, that that's true about prayer. You know, that that's true about prayer through Christ, but if you're not sure that you're in a state of grace, you have difficulty with that.

And so he ties that Assurance of what is happening in the act of prayer in verses 14 through 15 of first John 5 to that assurance that you are a Believer and have eternal life in the previous two verses verses 12 and 13. Well, first John 5. And this of course, is a work of the spirit.

He's the one who makes you call. God, what? As you pray? Not just, Forming the syllables Abba with your mouth. But recognizing that you're coming to God as a dear child. And that you're received by him. Who is unto you a loving and listening father. So, I hope that we are all Uh, pursuing Assurance of Independence upon the Spirit by the means through which God has appointed to give it.

One of these means particularly highlighted then, Ephesians chapter 3 verses 14 through 19. For this reason, I bow my knees to the father of our Lord, Jesus Christ from whom the whole family in Heaven and Earth is named That he would Grant you according to the riches of his glory.

Now this is shaping up to be a pretty big request, isn't it? To be strengthened with might through his spirit in the Inner Man. So now, it's according to the riches of God's glory, for, for the strength of God to be expressed and exercised upon you, by his spirit and the inner man.

What is this? Huge request. That Christ May dwell in your hearts, through faith. And that you being rooted and grounded in love. May be able to comprehend with all the saints. What is the width and length and depth and height okay? So so far it's measuring as it were perception of the greatness of the love of Christ.

But then he adds verse 19. To. The love of Christ, which passes knowledge. So there's a sense in which it passes knowledge, you can't know how big it is. But by the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit. According to the riches of the glory of God exercising, the power of God, although you cannot know the dimensions of it.

You can experientially know the reality of it to you and maybe you have puzzled over that phrase until now to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge So you cannot see how great it is. But by the ministry of the Holy Spirit to you, you may know that you individually.

Personally. Are an object of the love of Christ. And this is that. Which requires the power of God? To be exercised in the generosity and the riches that are according to the glory of God. So that you may be filled with all the fullness of God and so prayer itself.

Yes. A means of God's grace. By which he gives us this great gift. Of assurance of Faith Assurance that we are in a state of grace Assurance that we have eternal life assurance that we have the son. Assurance, that we are saved. So, you may You personally, each one of you.

May without extraordinary Revelation. And the right use of ordinary means. Attain to the Assurance. That you are in a state of grace. Amen, let's pray. Our gracious. God how we thank you. That you have given us. To be able to know. That we are saved. You have told us that you are the one who does this work by your spirit and your Almighty power.

You have taught us. The means that you have ordained designated appointed. By which we seek for your spirit to do this work in. And so we ask from you, Lord. That you would give us diligence. And the right use of these means that you have appointed make us diligent.

We pray In your worship. In Reading and especially hearing preached, your word in prayer. The use of the Lord's supper and baptism. Um, in the singing in the public worship. And the right use of your day and that Sabbath, keeping that remains Grant. Oh Lord, that these would not merely be religious rituals.

That that you would give us to rest upon you to use them and make us to know that we are yours. For, we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.