

“Of Saving Faith” part 11, WCF 14.3.2, How Saving Faith Is Attacked or Weakened

2021.05.16 Sabbath School Lesson

Hopewell ARPC, Culleoka, TN

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WCF 14.3 (TPH p927–8)

III. This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong;(k) **may be often and many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory;**(l) growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ,(m) who is both the author and finisher of our faith.(n)

(k) Heb. 5:13, 14; Rom. 4:19, 20; Matt. 6:30; Matt. 8:10.

(l) Luke 22:31, 32; Eph. 6:16; I John 5:4, 5.

(m) Heb. 6:11, 12; Heb. 10:22; Col. 2:2.

(n) Heb. 12:2.

Luke 22:31 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.”

The word translated, “indeed” means “behold.” In at least what two ways does the Lord call special attention to what He is about to say?

What being do these verses mention, besides Christ and the disciples? What did he want to do?

The “you” in v31 is plural; who, then, is under attack? Where else have we seen him ask for permission to do such a thing? Where, especially, is he doing so now (cf. Rev 12:10–12)?

Who is mentioned as having prayed in v32? The “you” in v32 is singular; how does this inform your understanding of the praying of our Lord?

What hadn’t the Lord prayed for Simon? What had He prayed?

On the basis of Christ’s prayer, what does He imply Peter will do at first (that Peter responds to in v33)? But what does He imply is guaranteed that Peter will then do?

What does the Lord’s instruction to Peter imply the brethren will need? And what does it imply is one of the instruments through which the Lord’s prayers for them will be answered?

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—

Who are addressed in this passage (v10)? Against what must they be enabled to stand (v11)? As what are his attacks described in v16?

What do the belt (v14a), shoes (v15), and sword (v17b) have in common? What do the breastplate (v14b), shoes (v15), and helmet (v17a) have in common?

With what must all the armor be employed (v18)? For whom ought we to pray in this manner?

(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 referenced above)

All right, let's start with prayer. Our father in Heaven how we thank you that even now your son our Lord Jesus intercedes for us that you're spirit intercedes for us. With groans words cannot express. We praise you that the accuser of the brethren has been cast down. And that it is our advocate who sits on the throne of glory now.

And we pray that you would help us as we continue to think from your word about. The faith that you have given us and our walking by it and growing in it. In particular how it is attacked. We pray that your spirit would bless to us to study in Jesus' name amen.

Alright, so. And last week's portion we looked at some scriptures that showed that true saving faith is something in which we grow which we hope to be strengthened that it varies by degrees. And in this week's portion, we come to the attacks upon our faith and the way the confession summarizes the Bible's teaching in this.

Paragraph of the chapter on saving faith is. This faith is different in degrees weak or strong may be often and many ways a sated and weakened. But gets the victory and it's that assailing or attacking and weakening that we're gonna think about from scripture this morning and in three places and rare is gonna be four.

One of the things that we need to do and then God's good providence, we're just thinking we're hearing in the preaching last week about the operations the attacks of the devil and as we think about that in Luke 22 and in Ephesians chapter 6, it's good for us to have revelation 12 and probably the entire first couple of chapters of the book of Job.

That didn't make reference to them here in the background you remember they're assuming knowledge of context, they're assuming that we're. The you know, the confession and the catechisms were written for church that was getting faithful preaching was having faithful family worship generation multiple generations of it at this point, so there's a great deal of biblical literacy that is assumed.

So maybe often in many in many ways a sated and that brings us to Luke chapter 22. Verses 31 through 32. And the Lord said Simon Simon. Now if I were to say Isaac Isaac, he would do just that huge lip around say why are you talking to me it's a good way of getting his attention remember translated indeed here is a word there's another one of those attention words it's a site attention word behold says Simon Simon behold, he wants his attention to something and of course, he's not paying good attention because he immediately answers in verse 30.

In a way that at least seems to ignore probably just didn't understand or maybe did much of what Jesus was saying and so there's passages calling us to attention it's one of the things you're gonna see in the sermon in fact the first three verses of the book of Joel are very much.

I call to attention so calls attention he calls attention to the fact. That Satan is active. Simon Simon indeed Satan has asked for you that he may sift as wheat. Now Satan is a being he's not merely an abstract concept he's not a fictional character from a novel he is a real being and he's a powerful being he was the most glorious of the angels before he fell.

Before he sinned. Now Satan has asked for you and the word you here is plural but we'll get to that in a moment. He's asked for them that he might sift them as wheat. Now, we don't do a lot of sifting and in our house and when we have we've sifted stuff that was already floured to get finer flour.

But that's not the kind of sifting that he is describing here. What would they? What would they have been doing when they were sifting? Can anyone help me with that? Or separating the wheat from the chaff and it's Satan's age-old position that everybody's chaff and nobody's wheat. You remember when the Lord?

Pointed out Job as wheat, you know, if you considered my servant Job there's nobody like him. Look, I'll blameless he is Satan said no he's just chaff his is just is just giving you a quid pro quo you've done good stuff for him he's doing good stuff for you.

Let me let me test him and and I'll show you that Job's goblinness isn't real. So this language of Satan sifting actually has reference to what we know of the character of the devil. As an accuser and that's what you wanted to do. This was the opportune time to attack the disciples and show their following Jesus isn't real.

This business about words of eternal life and just what things get hard. And so as the devil is attacking the Lord Jesus in his trial he is also very much attacking the disciples. He's using the hardship of having a Messiah who is not now only unpopular. As he has been in many times in his ministry but in which it actually becomes threateningly dangerous to belong to him as an opportunity to attack and try to show that their faith isn't real.

So he's attacking their faith. Now the English language doesn't help us very much in verses 31 and 32. You can tell from verse 32. I think that the you is singular there, but in verse 31 the US plural. So whom the Satan want to sift? Okay in verse 31 the US plural, so Peter's one of them.

Is specifically mentioned the disciples here, but yes it is all believers and we can know that not only because the you here is all of the disciples not only because of what we saw about his nature. In jazz when she is acting consistently here, but if you turn to the book of Revelation.

In chapter 12 where we spend a little bit of time last week in the sermon.

When we know that the fiery wedge dragon is that ancient serpent the devil. Who deceives the whole world and then in verse 9, he has cast to the earth and his angels are cast out with him and that by the way has connection to something that Jesus says that he saw in the sending out of the disciples remember they come back and they give their report and he says I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning.

And then verse 10 then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven now salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ have come so this to connected to the arrival of the kingdom the accuser of our brethren who accused them before our God day and night has been cast down and they're overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony and they did not love their lives to to the death therefore rejoice.

Of heavens and you who dwell in them were to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea for the devil has come down to you having great wrath because he knows that he has a short time and you pick up verse 17 as well and the dragon was enraged with the woman and went to make war with the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

And so the one who has as one of the primary aspects of this character one of the primary things that he does is this mission to make as many as possible appear as chaff instead of wheat that he would accuse us of not genuinely believing but now having been cast down from the seat from which he accused he is full time assailing attacking your faith if you're.

If you're a believer it is the girl of the devil to to keep your faith as small and make it look as bad as possible, so you're not just in a fight against your own flesh, you have someone who. Is full-time doing as Jesus here in Luke chapter 22 tells gets that Simon's attention in particular and tells the disciples all of them generally that he demands to sift or desires to sift them.

Now. Who is mentioned in verse 32 as having prayed in this US singular but we know that he prays for all of us but as having prayed for Simon or having prayed for Peter.

I heard it okay Jesus but I have prayed for you this is one of the wonderful encouragements that a Christian has is that the Lord Jesus constantly intercedes for us constantly praise for us one of our great griefs. I think is how poor we are at prayer and yet if you had to choose.

One person to offer perfect praying in your place and for your case would it not be the Lord Jesus but there's this thing about perfect praying it often doesn't sound like what we would have asked right that's why in Romans 8 when it says we don't know what to pray for as we ought the spirit intercedes for us he helps us in our weakness interceding for us does.

I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail. That's very interesting what doesn't Jesus pray? For Peter. Or the other disciples. That we would have expected in verse 32, yes.

Yeah.

He doesn't pray that they won't be sifted he doesn't pray that Satan won't be denied his request. It's very similar to when you're in job one and two and Jedi's and Satan is making these demands and part of you wants to ask and it's fleshly because it's questioning the wisdom of God, why didn't God just say no why didn't he just say drugs faith is real because I say so get away devil.

Okay, so it's part of the wisdom of God and it's part of the wisdom of Christ's intercession for us. That he does not pray that our faith would not be attacked. Because even when it is for a time weakened and stumbles true saving faith cannot fall and. So it's genuine character is brought out by attack and it is strengthened in its character by coming through attack and so we are often.

I think praying more don't let this trial that we can perceive as about to come upon us happen. And God in his providence and Christ and the spirit in their intersection are praying for the good purposes of God in the trial that's about to happen. Okay so faith is attacked and as long as our faith is imperfect and needing strengthening and as long as the devil is permitted to rage upon the earth, it will continue to be attacked in the words of Peter don't be surprised when the fiery trial comes upon you.

It is how the scriptures tell us having faith is going to be and even how faith is going to grow so what does Jesus pray for? Peter? That it won't fail. Now when our faith is attacked it's painful. And when it is not what we thought it was going to be under trial.

It is humiliating and you may even fear that it will be going all together. You remember in Peter's restoration. When Jesus asks him three times, do you love me and yes there's changes in the words used for love there and those words have more overlap than is usually. Communicated.

I think when people talk about those passages but the last time the third time corresponding to the number of denials and he says, do

you love me how does Peter answer?

Lord. You know. There's something about how terrifically he has stumbled or terribly he has stumbled which ironically to the way we use those words mean very similar things there's something about how badly he has stumbled that Peter can't even. Rely on what he knows about his faith. He's relying on what Christ knows about his faith.

Christ the giver of the faith. Christ, the one who prayed that he would not fail. And so it's Jesus having recognized that there is faith right it's hard sometimes in the gospels to figure out when these guys got converted. Because often after even after they've been disciples for a while they seem unconverted.

And we know that one of them was unconverted the whole time and became the betrayer. And yet Jesus positively here verifies for us at Peter's converted because he has a faith that Jesus prays will not fail but it's the fact that Jesus has identified that there Israel faith and that Jesus has prayed for him that it would not ultimately fail that Peter falls back upon in the third part of his restoration.

Lord, you know all things. I don't know anything. I don't even know that. I love you except for that you said I'm trusting that what you said about my loving my believing in you Israel. You know all things you know that I love you and you can see the Lord provoking him to cling to Christ's knowledge of his faith even more than his own knowledge of his faith.

And so there's this there's this wonderful case study here in these two verses of the fact. That Satan attacks our faith. The fact that these attacks come in this form of sifting to try and make us look as bad as possible so that we will appear as chaff or to borrow the from a another one of Jesus's parables that we will appear as tears instead of wheat and sometimes there's weak that looks so very much like a tear that if you're to pull the terrors out you'd pull out genuine wheat, but you have Jesus as the one who, is praying not only that the faith would not ultimately fail because it is genuine and as we'll see in first John if it's genuine it can't fail but he implies what when he says when you have returned to me.

Okay, that is faithful triumph. That's also implied both are implied right? After what in order to return you? You have to depart. Right? So, The the attack of Satan is not going to have no effect. It will have an effect he will fall and he will return and who else will need what at this point.

The end of verse 32 in in Jesus again, what does Jesus command? Peter to do when strength in the brethren, so he implies that the other disciples. Are going to be weakened and they're going to need strengthening. This is very important for us to exercise what remains 12 calls a sober judgment.

Corresponding to the measure of faith that God has given us knowing that even our believing has to be measured out to us. You know, we're all.

Yeah barefoot malnourished kids in the Kenyan UN camp food line when it comes to faith and you have the measuring out of faith in in the Bible this idea of giving out by measure is not like how to bake a loaf of bread. So when when God gives Ezekiel for instance this you have however many grains and certain measure of each one and he's defining exactly the measure the idea of the measure means there's, Not an overabundance then some of you have seen the bread and the serial and and and all that garbage from Ezekiel.

So it talks about have several judgment about yourself that will keep you from being thinking of yourself more highly than you want in accordance with faith having been measured out to you that both tells you your neediness that you're in other dependence on the one who measures it out to you, but it also tells you that there is one who is measuring out to you who, is who is giving it to you.

Okay, so the brethren will need to be strengthened the brethren will need to have their faith short up and restored and what is Jesus going to use to strengthen the brethren?

And of end of verse 32, it's a what question. Whether who answered but the who this time isn't Jesus. Peter. Is Peter so you know, there's there's multiple things about the strengthening of our faith that we're going to see a little bit more when we get to Ephesians 6, but you can already see them here the Lord's word is designed to strengthen the faith and give their faith and give instruction for how he's going to do that the words praying is that which guarantees that their faith will not fail and that their faith will be strengthened, but the Lord also uses them.

In the strengthening of one another's faith. And we see that for instance in Ephesians chapter four and one of the reasons why Jesus has given Apostles prophets evangelists and Pastor teachers is because it's God's pleasure to grow each part of the body through instrumentally the other parts of the body.

And so every joint has to supply something. And the weaker you are in faith the less helpful you are as a joint in the body. You never see someone stumbling along when a bum knee or a bum ankle. You know, there's weak faith and even with dislocated joint is even worse.

So he intends to use us in the strengthening of one another's faith Ephesians, six then.

We saw this recently going through Ephesians. But it bears mentioning that the light versus darkness section of Ephesians actually starts early in chapter five and when he goes on to talk about the public worship and monitoring one another and Psalm Tim's and

spiritual songs and marriage and parenting he's not he's not changed the subject.

Because when we get to chapter six, he's still talking about light verse darkness and he's talking about it much more explicitly now in terms of. Resisting the devil versus ten through eighteen finally my brethren be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the walls of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities against powers against the rulers of the darkness of this age against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places and very similar we don't have time to go all the way through the book of Ephesians, but you know recently having been through a many of you can remember how one of the themes of the book up into this point has been that God makes display of.

The glory of his grace by what he does in Christians and in the church and that this display is especially in heaven where we are united to Christ so that even the angels marvel at the work that God is doing in believers before they even leave this world and so there's this great investment of God's glory in our sanctification even while we're still on earth.

And he who cannot who is not in heaven now to attack still has opportunity then on earth to attack the display of the glory of the God he's so hates. Therefore verse 13, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and he is tying us back now into chapter 5 redeeming the time because the days are evil and having done all to stand therefore, okay, this is military language verse 11 stand verse 13 stand verse 14 stand we are holding a line.

Against an assault. Having girded your waist with truth having put on the breastplate of righteousness and having you shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace above all taking the shield of faith. With which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God praying is with all prayer and supplication in the spirit being multiple to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. Okay, so first three words last three words who is being addressed in this passage and he says finally my brethren at the beginning and he says for all the saints at the end who's being addressed.

Believers and hopefully one of you said I am I am being addressed not just all those believers out there, but me. And against what are we being enabled to stand and commanded to stand by use of this armor?

Stand against verse. The walls of the devil we are not ignorant of his devices so we know that his design is to assault the glory of God by making believers appear as unbelievers as chaff and in second Corinthians 2 same thing when he says to reaffirm your love for that repentant of believer who's coming out from under discipline he says show your affection for him and he says for, We are not ignorant of Satan's devices.

Because it is one of God's appointed means that we would stand together and reinforce one another the fellowship of the saints in standing together is one of the things that Satan most attacks so we are standing against the walls of the devil and we've been given equipment. By which to withstand these attacks which he calls and verse 16, what does he call those attacks?

Fiery darts. Okay moments of attack that are designed to cause ongoing and hopefully by the designer increasing harm right that's why you cover the tip with pitch and light it on fire and fire it because you want more than just that moment of giving into sin or letting your lips go and gossip or speaking roughly and having that that that outburst of of wrath.

What happens for those of you who are genuine believers and you love the Lord you want to honor him and all things and this is one of the the great efforts of your life independence upon him what happens when the fiery dart you you get that moment to the fiery duct, it's not just a dart it's a fiery dart isn't it it burns?

You hash over it you that you you become consumed with how you have dishonored your savior you start to doubt whether you have made any progress in grace at all this idea that your faith is something that Jesus has given and that is maturing is shaken. And so he he says you have faith that can be weakened you have faith that can be exposed for being much weaker than you thought it was this is part of the way that the devil attacks you is is an order to to give the impression that you are chaff and obscure the glory of God and to weaken you and so he gives us this armor that is against it.

Now there's at least two major things obviously, you know that you can read you know, there's full treatise book length treatments of just the armor of God Christian and complete armor is wonderful. I think we've had it on the back table before but what do truth in the belt gospel in the shoes and the sword which is the word of God.

In verse 17, what do truth gospel and word have in common? Words scripture. Okay, so Satan attacks with what you are still like and one of your primary defenses is the word of God that is always true and cannot change and announce this peace between you and God. In case you have that which is firm and unchangeable because you're still in the process of changing and you are changing for the better your maturing and growing in faith but part of the fact of being someone who still growing is that you still have much weakness.

Okay so truth and then especially a at the core of that truth. What do righteousness and the breastplate salvation in the helmet and then again this gospel in verse 16, peace have in common righteousness, peace and salvation. Christ and the status that we have in

him. If you are right with God in Christ, then God is committed to doing everything that is good for you if you have peace with God in Christ then all that God is is for all of your good you now have God as your ally and you know, the reason people will know do a study on shalom and say look how whole this piece of well, of course it is because it's peace with God.

God doesn't do anything by halves, okay, so righteousness and peace and salvation. God doesn't say in part he doesn't say I'll give you the part of salvation that is being made right with me. I'll even give you the part that is starting out in faith but I won't give you the part that is being conformed to the image of Christ and rising again from the dead and enjoying me perfectly in perfect holiness forever.

God's salvation is a whole and if you have already the the justification through Christ and peace through Christ and adoption through Christ, you'll get the rest that is also through Christ and so. So you have this above all attached to verse 16 the shield of faith because what have we been learning about faith?

Faith isn't hope for an uncertain thing an undefined thing uncertain is not a good word to use because of its closest to it, it's not hope for an undefined thing faith is being sure of what God has said with a particular focus on what he has said about Jesus and who Jesus is and, what Jesus has done so there's a sense in which you take the fact that the the honor having to do with the word of God and the armor especially having to do with what the word of God says about what Christ has done and what you have in that and faith is saying I will believe and cling to that.

I will appropriate that for myself. Okay, so. When your faith is attacked. It doesn't look to itself why because your faith is weak. Faith when it is attacked and to sailed and exposed as weak turns back to the Christ who is perfectly and infinitely strong now this turning back to him has an application it shows up in action, what is that action in verse 18?

Yes praying always without prayer, you know, you love those wonderful Bible redundancies which often one of the first things you see is how do we are and how merciful God is to that dullness that he doubles up or triples up what he's saying praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit being multiple to this end with oh perseverance.

Okay looking away from yourself and to Christ. If you're breathing or you're thinking. Is expressed in prayer. Maybe some of you children when you've heard mom or dad or me or one of the other elders and teaching or preaching say look to Christ. You thought well how do I know if I'm looking to Christ and you kind of like act with some effort on your own soul and say okay soul, let's look to Christ.

Which. That's not wrong. And you know Psalm 42. Psalm 103 instructing yourself, commanding yourself. How do you know when Zeth is looking to Jordan or Stephanie or actually another one of you? What does it look like? Looks like this okay, so there is a sense in which. You're just doing this with your soul.

But what else does he do?

Which is literally what the Bible says the Holy Spirit makes your heart and your mouth do when you receive him in being regenerated unto faith in Christ, he's the one who makes you call God your alfa and that's what he describes here praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit being watchful to this end with all perseverance.

See. Maturing biblical faith does not recognize itself as strong. Maturing biblical faith recognizes the Lord as strong. So when he talks about employing the armor as a strong warrior to stand against the assault. After he describes all the armor. He says, Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit.

Lifting the arms to and crying out for the help in the way that the Holy Spirit has trained your heart and your tongue to address your father. Who has made himself your strength in the sun and not only are we to do that for ourselves, but where to pray for others and we're way over.

I'm sorry. Well, we'll pick up the first John 5 next week. Let's pray.

Father we thank you for telling us a plainly about how our enemy operates and what he wants we thank you all the more for telling us a plainly how our Redeemer operates. What he has done what he is doing how this has worked out in our lives and in our responses to him help us so God to be soldiers of faith who reach up to you and cry out to you who depend upon you especially by means of clinging to your word and what it says about Christ.

Grant that your spirit would keep working this out in us we ask in Christ's name. Amen.