

**Chapter 17 of the 1689 Confession of Faith: “Of The Perseverance of the Saints”,
Session # 11, “Perseverance and a Clear Conscience”, Presented by Pastor
Paul Rendall in the Adult Sunday School, on October 29th, 2017.**

Paragraph 3 - And though they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous i)sins, and for a time continue therein j), whereby they incur k)God’s displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to have their graces and l)comforts impaired, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, m)hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments n)upon themselves, yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.

i) Matthew 26: 70, 72, 74; k) Isaiah 64: 5, 9; Ephesians 4: 30; l) Psalm 51: 10,12;

m) Psalm 32: 3-4; n) 2nd Samuel 12:14; o) Luke 22: 32, 61-62

Perseverance involves keeping a Clear Conscience –

Revelation 12: 9-11 – “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. 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, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”

The context of these verses is Satan’s being cast out of his “heaven” of persecuting Christians during the time of the Pagan Roman Empire. These dear Christians who were falsely accused by Satan’s instigating lies about them, what they supposedly did which was sinful or shameful to even think about, meant that they were persecuted and put to death by the authorities on charges which were not true. John Gill says – “here it refers to the accusations brought against the Christians in the primitive times, during the ten persecutions, which were very horrid ones indeed; as that they had their private suppers, at which they ate their own infants, and their nightly meetings, for the gratifying of their lusts, in which they committed adultery, incest, and all manner of uncleanness; if ever a fire happened in a city, they were charged with it; and whenever there were any famine, or pestilence, or wars, or any public calamity, they were accused as the cause and occasion of it.” (end of quote) But it says here in these verses that they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony and they did not love their lives to the death.

Let us understand that the devil does not want us to have a clear conscience before God and he will do all that he can to undermine our confidence toward God and attempt to make us look reprehensible (blameworthy, extremely bad, or unacceptable) in the sight of men.

Acts 24: 14-16 – “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.” “I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.” “This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.”

John Calvin says on verse 16 – And herein do I study. There is no sharper prick to prick men forward, with all desire to lead a godly and holy life, than the hope of the last resurrection,

as the Scripture teaches in many places. Therefore, when Paul will effectually exhort the people anywhere, he calls them back to remember the same (Phi_3:20). Wherefore, it is not without cause that he saith in this place, that staying himself upon this faith, he hath endeavored to live purely before God, and righteously among men. And surely an evil conscience is as good as a thousand witnesses to accuse – (586) men of blockishness, that they may gather for a certainty that they do not earnestly and thoroughly believe eternal life, after which they never long. He calleth it a conscience, *απροσκοπον*, (*aproscopon*) that is, without offense, where the servants of God labor to remove all lets which hinder their course. And he putteth two parts of the conscience. For there is a certain inward sense or feeling which beholds – God alone, and thence cometh faithfulness and integrity which we use towards men. At length, when he saith that he hath constantly followed as well, godliness in worshipping God, as just dealing among men, he signifies unto us that those do indeed hope for the last resurrection who are never weary of well-doing. For this word “always” doth signify perseverance in a straight course.”

1st John 3: 20 – “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” “And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.” “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.” “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.” “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” “And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.”

“If our heart condemns us” means that our conscience has been showing us that we have been doing something wrong; in this case, not loving in deed and in truth even though we love in word only. No, our words of love must lead to our deeds of love, and then we shall assure our hearts before God. And further, we will have confidence before God if our conscience is clear; in that whatever we ask we can know that we will receive it because we keep His commandments and do those things which are pleasing in His sight; believing in Christ’s name and loving one another.

John Calvin says: “Why then does the Apostle say, We shall assure our hearts before God ? He reminds us by these words, that faith does not exist without a good conscience; not that assurance arises from it or depends on it, but that then only we are really and not falsely assured of our union with God, when by the efficacy of his Holy Spirit he manifests himself in our love. For it is ever meet and proper to consider what the Apostle handles; for as he condemns feigned and false profession of faith, he says that a genuine assurance before God we cannot have, except his Spirit produces in us the fruit of love. Nevertheless, though a good conscience cannot be separated from faith, yet no one should hence conclude that we must look to our works in order that our assurance may be certain.”

2nd Corinthians 2: 6-11 – “This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.”

The punishment inflicted by the majority was the excommunication of the man mentioned in 1st Corinthians 5. He has repented of his sin of “having his father’s wife”, and was mourning over his sin, but evidently the church had not issued a formal forgiveness to him, telling him of his restoration. Paul urges them to forgive and comfort him, lest he be swallowed up with too much sorrow. If they did not forgive him, he might be taken advantage of by Satan. What does this mean?

Well, John Gill very perceptively says this: “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us,.... Or make gain of us, or we should be circumvented by him; a metaphor taken from covetous persons, who take every occasion, and make use of every advantage to circumvent and deceive persons in trading with them: Satan gets an advantage of the churches, when church discipline is brought into neglect and contempt, or turned into tyranny; or when he can draw off any person from a church, or keep him out of it: wherefore the apostle’s argument is, that since the incestuous person had true repentance for his sin, he ought to be forgiven, comforted, and received into the church; lest by too great severity, and a too long continuance of the censure on him, he should be either plunged into despair, or be drawn into a denial of the faith, or into an open scandalous course of wickedness; and so the church entirely lose a member, that might, by the proper use of discipline, have been an useful one, and Satan gain one:

for we are not ignorant of his devices; and cunning stratagems; some of his crafty contrivances and designs are known, though not all of them; and this particularly, that he sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light, and under pretense of showing a just indignation against sin, and keeping up a strict and righteous discipline, destroys souls, ruins churches, and brings religion into contempt. This was one of his devices in former times, that persons who fell into any gross sin after baptism, and a profession of religion, were never to be restored and received into the communion of the church again, let their repentance be ever so sincere. This cruel and inexorable spirit, under the show of strict religion and discipline, is what the apostle here would caution against, as one of the wiles of Satan.”