

Chapter 17 of the 1689 Confession of Faith: “Of The Perseverance of the Saints”,
Session # 9, “Perseverance and Watching”, Presented by Pastor
Paul Rendall in the Adult Sunday School, on October 8th, 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

Matthew 26: 31- – “Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I WILL STRIKE THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK WILL BE SCATTERED.' But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples. Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

Now, how do you think that Satan “sifted” Peter like wheat? He got him to thinking that his own determination to do what was right was enough to enable Him to go with Christ into this great spiritual battle. He didn’t have to watch and pray. Jesus had warned him twice that he needed to watch and pray lest he enter into temptation. His spirit was willing, but His flesh was weak. This is how it is for all Christians. This principle of truth must be believed and we must indeed watch and pray that we enter not into temptation. To enter means to give in to the temptation. What then must we do that we not enter in? Watch and pray. Watch against fleshly weakness and try to understand the Devil’s tactics. In Peter’s case it was to get him to think that he could follow his Master to the cross and die, without wrestling and struggling in prayer over it like Jesus Himself did.

Listen to John Calvin here: “Watch and pray. As the disciples were unmoved by their Master’s danger, their attention is directed to themselves, that a conviction of their own danger may arouse them. Christ therefore threatens that, if they do not watch and pray, they may be soon overwhelmed by temptation. As if He had said, “Though you take no concern about Me, do not fail, at least, to think of yourselves; for your own interests are involved in it, and if you do not take care, temptation will immediately swallow you up.” For to enter into temptation means to yield to it. And let us observe, that the manner of resistance which is here enjoined is, not to draw courage from reliance on our own strength and perseverance, but, on the contrary, from a conviction of our weakness, to ask arms and strength from the Lord. Our watching, therefore, will be of no avail without prayer.”

“**The spirit indeed is willing.**” That He may not terrify and discourage His disciples, He gently reproves their slothfulness, and adds consolation and good ground of hope. And, first, He reminds them, that though they are earnestly desirous to do what is right, still they must contend with the weakness of the flesh, and, therefore, that prayer is never unnecessary. We see, then, that He gives them the praise of willingness, in order that their weakness may not throw them into despair, and yet urges them to prayer, because they are not sufficiently endowed with the power of the Spirit. Wherefore, this admonition relates properly to believers, who, being regenerated by the Spirit of God, are desirous to do what is right, but still labor under the weakness of the flesh; for though the grace of the Spirit is vigorous in them, they are weak according to the flesh. And though the disciples alone have their weakness here pointed out to them, yet, since what Christ says of them applies equally to all, we ought to draw from it a general rule, that it is our duty to keep diligent watch

by praying; for we do not yet possess the power of the Spirit in such a measure as not to fall frequently through the weakness of the flesh, unless the Lord grant his assistance to raise up and uphold us. But there is no reason why we should tremble with excessive anxiety; for an undoubted remedy is held out to us, which we will neither have, nor to seek, nor to seek in vain; for Christ promises that all who, being earnest in prayer, shall perseveringly oppose the slothfulness of the flesh, will be victorious.”

Ephesians 6: 10-18 – “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 wiles 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. 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. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having 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 always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”

In order to prevent your falling into sin through the temptations of Satan you must take up the armor of God. Notice how Paul prefaces this exhortation with another essential exhortation. If you are to do battle with the Devil, you first of all have to be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might; not be strong in yourself and the strength of your might. This strength to do battle and to overcome the evil one comes by faith in Christ, and prayer to God in the name of Christ, the victorious conqueror of sin and death, and the One who overcame Satan at the cross. Then he instructs us to put on the whole armor of God. The panoply(πανοπλιαν), the various pieces of armor that a Roman soldier wore are being here used to illustrate what is meant spiritually to be used for defense by the Christian being besieged by the Devil.

The reason for putting this armor on, spiritually, is so that the Christian may be able to stand against all the wiles of the Devil. (Προς τας μετηοδειας του διαβολου) All the methods of the Devil; all of his schemes. Now the methods of the Devil must necessarily relate to these pieces of armor. We **gird the waist with truth**, which means that the Devil’s schemes must be to get me to believe lies concerning doctrine, concerning what the Bible teaches, and especially the truth of the gospel which we must keep close to us and not put it off. **The breastplate of righteousness** is needed to guard us against the schemes of the Devil to deceive us about what is right and wrong and about what is needed for us to be righteous in the sight of God. The breastplate shields our hearts in battle through our trusting only in the imparted righteousness of Christ for our justification, and it covers all of our personal acts of righteousness being imputed to them at every point. Also Christ’s grace is imparted righteousness in that we are enabled to do what is right consistently and to the glory of God and in love for people around us, we persevere in righteousness.