

When you watch a football game, sometimes you can see a fumble coming before it actually happens. The runner carelessly holds the ball with one hand and you just know that he won't be able to maintain his grip when he's hit. The hit comes; the ball bounces away. "I knew it," you say to yourself.

Sometimes you can see a fellow Christian heading for trouble before trouble actually strikes. And like the careless football player, it's a matter of not holding on tightly enough. God has given us the foundation for faith and life in his holy Word. When a believer starts to turn their back on Word and Sacrament, they simply aren't going to be able to withstand what the world and the devil throw at them.

At this point each of us might be tempted to think of people we know, church members whom we don't see as much or at all anymore, former Christians who may have lost their faith. We all know such people. Let's stop, though, for a minute, and not point our fingers at others. Let's look exclusively at ourselves.

The apostle Paul was inspired to warn us thusly: "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (I Corinthians 10:12). It's relatively easy to carry a football if nobody is trying to knock you down to take it from you. Similarly, it's easy for me to be a Christian when everything is going well for me, when I see no trouble on the horizon, when all my plans seem to be succeeding and everyone seems to like me.

But what if I am blindsided by personal loss or a health crisis? What if I lose a trusted friend? What if the plans I make for my life and career fail? How much would it take for me to fumble away my faith?

A football player works to get stronger during the week so that when the hits come on game day, he is ready to absorb them. I as a Christian need the constant strengthening of God's Holy Spirit to hold on through everything that can happen to me in life. And the Holy Spirit comes to me through the Gospel as I read God's Word and worship with my fellow Christians. So when trouble comes, instead of fumbling away my faith I hold on even more tightly to it.

And when I look at what God has to say to me I have the comfort of knowing that even though I fumble, even though I make mistakes, he holds on to me with a strength that cannot be overcome. The same Paul who warned us to be careful lest I fall also wrote, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38,39). The love that makes him hold on to me is the same love that makes me want to hold on tightly to him.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your love is perfect, and yet sometimes I look for security and peace outside of your love. Forgive me. Work in me and my fellow Christians such love for you that we would rather lose everything else in our lives than lose you. Thank you for making me your child. Keep your promise to always be with me. I look forward to being with you. In your name, Amen.

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