

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

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Salvation

As Jonah said, "Salvation is of the Lord." The complete and eternal salvation for each of the elect is absolutely certain. This is guaranteed by the electing grace of God the Father, the redeeming grace of God the Son, and the regenerating and preserving grace of God the Holy Spirit. No one nor no thing can separate the children of God from the love of God. Salvation is entirely of the Lord. That is a most glorious truth that we should constantly be thankful for and rejoice in. The child of God has nothing to do with his or her salvation.

Assurance

However, the child of God can have much to do with the assurance of salvation. Sometimes we have doubts and fears. We fall into temptation and maybe succumb to it and we wonder if we are truly born from above. Sometimes we may not feel the joy of our salvation. Some very difficult circumstances come into our lives and Satan whispers to us that God does not truly love us or He would not allow such tragic things to happen to us. While we cannot lose our salvation, we can certainly, for a period of time, lose the assurance of that salvation and be in the pit of despair.

Why Assurance is Important

The question may be asked, "Is it really so important that we have the assurance of our salvation? After all, if I am bound for glory and will get there no matter how I feel, why be so concerned about this assurance?"

To have the assurance of our salvation is very important for several reasons. First among them, we can **better praise God** if the prospect of our salvation is bright and clear to us. God deserves our constant praise. David prayed in Psalm 71:8, "Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day." It is written in Hebrews 13:15, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." It is obvious that we can much better do this if our salvation is clear to us. Those who are on the way to heaven can offer to their God exuberant thanksgiving and praise. They are likely to imitate David's example of praise in Psalm 103:1-3, "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases..."

Another reason that makes assurance important is that when we are in an assured attitude of mind, we will be **better witnesses** to the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Psalmist said in Psalm 107:2, "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy..." If we are happy with our salvation, those about us cannot fail to note it and we will be thus glorifying God by our obvious joy and gratitude.

A third reason that makes assurance important is that when we are confident of our salvation we are better able to **be strong in the Lord and to do battle** against Satan, the world and our own flesh. We find written in

Nehemiah 8: 10, "for the joy of the LORD is your strength." We are likely to be better soldiers of Jesus Christ when our morale is high because we expect to be with our Lord forever when we leave this sinful world.

A fourth reason that assurance is important is that when we are in a state of assurance we will be **better able to help our brothers and sisters**. David, like all children of God, never lost his salvation, but he lost the joy and assurance of his salvation by his sin. He begged God to restore this joy to him in the following language from Psalm 51:12, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee." David is saying here, "Lord, let me have my assurance back and I will help poor sinners who have lost their assurance."

A very important reason that we should desire the blessed assurance of our salvation is that **we will not fear death**. Each of us will die if the Lord does not return first. Death is a fearful thing to face. It is the last enemy. Some people think much about death. They live their lives in fear. This fear affects the ways they think and behave. They live in bondage. God does not intend for His children to live this way. In fact, one of the main reasons that Jesus Christ became incarnate was to remove the fear of death from His people. We find this in the glorious passage from the word of God recorded in Hebrews 2:14, 15, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Can you imagine how a fear of death would have crippled Paul's ministry? Paul had many people who hated him and who sought his life. If he had been afraid of death he would have gone into hiding. But Paul did not fear death, because he had the assurance of his salvation. He revealed this in 2 Tim. 1: 12, "...for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." In fact, he looked forward to death. He said in Phil. 1: 23 that he had "a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better..." Paul knew that he was a child of God and that his times were in the hands of the Lord. He was free to serve his master even in times of danger without fear. How liberating was his assurance of salvation!

It is Our Duty

Even if none of the above reasons were not valid, it remains that it our duty to seek to gain the assurance of our salvation, simply because **we are commanded to do so** in the Scriptures. We read of this in 2 Peter 1:10, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall..." What is Peter talking about here? It is certain that he is not talking about making our election sure to God. God chose His people in Christ before the world even began. We read of this in Ephesians 1:4, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love..." The names of God's elect people were written in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world. (Rev. 13: 8; 17: 8).

Peter probably is speaking of two things here. We can make our calling **sure to others**. Paul had never seen the Book of Life. However he knew some people whose names were in it. We read of this in Philippians 4:3, "And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life." These people demonstrated that they were true Christians by the lives they lived. Paul was absolutely certain that they were recipients of salvation. He also knew some other people were among the elect. He said in 1 Thessalonians 1:4, 5, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance..." He was certain that they were of the elect because of the way they had responded to the gospel. This response was not what had brought salvation to them. The response was an

evidence of their salvation. We should live in such a way that our families and brothers and sisters in Christ may know that we are God's elect.

Peter also had in mind that we should make our calling and election **sure to ourselves**. God will give us assurance of our salvation as we walk in fellowship with Him. Peter says that we should be diligent to do this.

How Do We Go About It?

Faith

How do we make our calling and election sure to ourselves and to others? Peter shows us how. He says in 2 Pet. 1: 1 that he is speaking "to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ..." The word translated "obtained" here means "to receive by divine allotment." Faith is a grace that is given to each of the elect when they are born again. Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God..." God not only gives this grace of faith to each of the elect when they are born from above, He also sustains this faith throughout the entire life of the child of God. It is impossible for them to lose this faith. Hebrews 12: 2 speaks of "Jesus the **author** and **finisher** of our faith." Satan can cause the children of God much trouble. He would like to completely destroy their faith, but he cannot do so. He can so harass and tempt them that they may have temporary lapses of the exercise of their faith, but he cannot obliterate this wonderful grace. Satan turned his most powerful weapons on Peter. However, Peter's faith did not finally fail because of the intercessory work of Christ. We read of this in Luke 22:31, 32, "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Even today the faith of every child of God is guaranteed by the intercessory work of Christ. We read of this in Hebrews 7:25, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Christ intercedes for each of His children, and the Father always hears the prayers of His only begotten Son. Therefore, the continuance of their faith is absolutely insured.

This God-given faith is powerful indeed. It enables the child of God to overcome the present evil world that we live in. Every child of God will be an overcomer. This is made plain in 1 John 5:4, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." This does not mean that the heaven-born person will never stumble nor fall into sin. It does mean, however, that he will not live his entire life in open rebellion against God. He will not lose his salvation, but he may for a time lose the assurance and joy of his salvation.

Adding to Faith

As we have seen, faith is a basic grace, given to the child of God in regeneration. This faith comes as an absolutely free gift, given sovereignly by God with no help or even cooperation on the part of the sinner. In fact, commenting on the word translated "obtained" in 2 Pet. 1: 1, Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says, "In this sentence the point of [the word translated "obtained"] is that faith has come to them from God with no co-operation on their part. That faith is the work, not of man, but of God, or Christ, is not stated with equal clarity in all parts of the N T, but it must be constantly borne in mind."

What then is the child of God to do with this faith that God has given? He is to **very diligently** add to that faith certain things. Peter enumerates the things that are to be added. They are "**virtue**" (moral excellence), "**knowledge**" (of the word of God), "**temperance**" (self-control), "**patience**" (endurance under trials in the

Christian life), “**godliness**” (reverence and respect towards God, manifested in attitudes and actions), “**brotherly kindness**”(exercised toward fellow-believers), and “**charity**”(love demonstrated to all, enemies as well as friends). I like what John Gill has to say about this: “As faith leads the van, charity brings up the rear, and is the greatest of all.”

The result of this diligence is the **blessed assurance** of our salvation. This is taught in 2 Peter 1:8, “For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Citizens of the Kingdom

Another place in the Scriptures where the child of God can go for the assurance of his salvation is the Beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount has been called “the gospel of the kingdom.” The portion of this sermon called the Beatitudes describes the characteristics of the Citizens of the Kingdom. If we can find ourselves possessing these characteristics, we can have the assurance that we are heaven-born citizens of this kingdom. The very first characteristic is that of being **poor in spirit**. This describes one who knows that he has nothing good in himself. He is not proud, self-sufficient, nor self-righteous. He knows that his only hope is that he has a “rich, almighty Friend.” The next trait is that of **mourning**. This concerns mourning for one’s sins. The child of God can never in this world see himself as he would wish to be. He sees how he has failed to glorify his Lord as he should and this frequently causes him grief of soul. The next attribute of the citizen of the kingdom is he is **meek**. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* has a good description of this grace: “Described negatively, meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest; it is equanimity of spirit that is neither elated nor cast down, simply because it is not occupied with self at all.” *Synonyms of the New Testament* by R. C. Trench also has a very good description of this meekness: “Rather it is an inwrought grace of the soul; and the exercises of it are first and chiefly towards God...It is that temper of spirit in which we accept his dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting...This meekness, however, being first of all a meekness before God, is also such in the face of men, even of evil men, out of a sense that these, with the insults and injuries which they may inflict, are permitted and employed by Him for the chastening and purifying of his elect.”

The child of God is also one which **hungers and thirsts after righteousness**. He has a desire for perfect holiness which he will not attain until he is glorified. Therefore he will never be totally satisfied in his present state. The heaven-born soul is also **merciful**. He is acutely conscious of the fact that he is a “vessel of mercy” and this will temper how he deals with others. He will also be **pure in heart**. These are those who desire to be holy in their motives and principles. They pray as David did in Psalm 19:14, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”

This individual will also be a **peacemaker**. He will be prone to use his influence to reconcile opposing parties. Being a peacemaker is the very opposite of “he that soweth discord among brethren,” one of the seven things the Lord hates. (Prov. 6: 19).

These citizens of the kingdom are often “persecuted for righteousness' sake.” The world hates these gentle folk as it hated their Lord before them. Jesus spoke to such in the following words from John 15:18, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.” We who hope to be the children of God should not be surprised at persecution. The word of God instructs us to “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.” (1 John 3:13).

Assurance From 1 John

The apostle John wrote his first epistle under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the express purpose of giving to the children of God the blessed assurance of their salvation. He said in 1 John 1:4, "And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." There are basically **three strong evidences of salvation** that are interwoven throughout this small but glorious epistle. The first evidence is that of **obedience**. The born-again child of God loves God and wants to please his heavenly Father by being obedient to Him. The one who walks in persistent and habitual disobedience will not have the assurance of his salvation. This is made plain in 1 John 1:6, "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth..." John also says in 1 John 2:3, 4, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." It is impossible to be assured of our salvation when we persist in disobedience to God.

Another evidence of salvation in this epistle is that of **love to God and to our fellowman**. The source of this love is God, Himself. "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19). The way we manifest our love to God is by being obedient to Him and in trying to please Him. If we really love God we will love each other. 1 John 4:20, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" One of the most comforting Scriptures in all the Bible to the sin-tossed soul who is trying to gain the assurance of his salvation is 1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death."

How do we know if we love the brethren? By our actions. John expresses it this way: "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:17, 18). If we claim to love our brethren, but do not obey God, our claims are empty. This is made very plain in 1 John 5:2, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments."

The final evidence of salvation in 1 John is the evidence of **belief in the Lord Jesus**. This is plainly shown in several scriptures, including 1 John 5:1, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God..." Believing that Jesus is the Christ is not what gets one born of God, but it is wonderful evidence that one has been given eternal life. Another Scripture that ties in belief with assurance of salvation is 1 John 2:22, 23, "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also." This is strong but plain language. Still another passage is found in 1 John 4:15, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."

The child of God can come to the wonderful book of 1 John and find great comfort in the fact that he believes that Jesus is the Christ, that he, however imperfectly, loves God and his Christian brethren, and that he has a great desire to be obedient to his heavenly Father.

A Great Blessing

There can be no greater blessing for the child of God living in this present world than to be confidently assured of His salvation. Money, prestige, power, will not bring peace and confidence. But assurance of salvation will. The prophet expressed it hundreds of years ago in these words: "Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me..." (Jeremiah 9:23, 24).

Fanny Crosby beautifully expressed the joy of assurance in these memorable words:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

When the saint has this kind of assurance, he can say:

This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Saviour all the day long.

God's Provisions

Does God want His blood-bought children to be assured of their salvation? He most certainly does, as He has plainly expressed in His word. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write the Epistle to the Ephesians. There are two beautiful prayers of Paul recorded in this book. In moving words Paul prayed fervently that the Ephesian saints might be assured of the incomprehensible love that God had manifested to them in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul prayed "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May **be able to comprehend** with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." (Eph.3: 17-19). He wanted the saints to be aware of the **glorious dimensions** of the amazing love of God to them. When they are aware of this love in the **full assurance** of their salvation they are able to glorify God as they praise Him in verses like the following:

To our Redeemer's glorious name, awake the sacred song;
O may His love (immortal flame) tune ev'ry heart and tongue.

His love! What mortal tho't can sketch, what mortal tongue display?
Imagination's utmost stretch in wonder dies away.

When the child of God has this kind of assurance, he can then say:

Redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die,
and then I hope to sing this love in sweeter strains on high.

Our dear Lord so wants us to be assured of our salvation that He not only promised it, He confirmed His promise with a **solemn oath** This is incredible when we consider that the promise of God was absolutely sure in itself. We read in Titus 1:2, "In hope of eternal life, which **God, that cannot lie**, promised before the world began..." However, even though that promise was an absolute guarantee of eternal life to all of God's children, He confirmed that solemn promise with an oath. This is gloriously recorded for us in Hebrews 6:17, 18, "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us..."

My dear friend, God has graciously provided for us that we may have the assurance of our salvation. He has given instructions and promises to us. Let us be diligent in the use of the means that God has so generously given to us.

Let us say with David when he was an old man: "But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more." (Psalm 71:14).

