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THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

Is it possible for you to know that your sins are forgiven? Can you be sure that you are on your way to heaven? What about the fear of judgment and the frightening possibility of going to hell? Can you know without any doubt that God has saved you from the eternal consequences of sin?

This booklet, written by *Our Daily Bread* managing editor Kurt De Haan, takes a look at what the Bible has to say in response to such questions. The specific focus of attention for this study will be the words of the apostle John from his first letter, which addresses this issue of the assurance of salvation. It is our prayer that as you read these pages you will discover the answers you need.

Martin R. De Haan II

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WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

Do you like spinach? What about prime rib? Would you like to visit the South Pole? Are you optimistic about the nation's economy? If people were polled on these types of questions, they would give one of three different answers:

- YES
- NO
- UNDECIDED

In the same way, opinions about whether or not a person can be sure of going to heaven fall into one of these three categories. Some people say yes, others say no, and still others are undecided.

The ideas listed below represent variations of these three possible answers when people were asked about their hope for eternal life. See if you can identify with any of their responses.

Not worrying. “I think it’s a waste of time to worry about whether or not I’m going to heaven. There’s no way to know for sure. I won’t know until I die.”

Fearing the worst. “It seems like I’m always failing God. And when I do, I’m afraid I’m going to end up in hell after all.”

Trusting God’s promises. “I’m sure I’m on my way to heaven because of verses like John 5:24. I put my confidence in the promises of God’s Word.”

Remembering a day. “I know I’m going to heaven because I remember the day I prayed to receive Christ into my life.”

Leaving it up to God. “I would never dare to say I am going to heaven. That’s up to God to decide.”

Feeling unworthy. “Sometimes I feel that God loves me and is going to

take me to heaven. But when I'm depressed, I feel unworthy and hopeless."

Depending on God's love. "If God is as loving as people say He is, He won't send anyone to hell."

Replacing feelings with facts. "Knowing I'm saved isn't based on feelings but on facts. I believe the Bible has those facts."

*Assurance of
salvation is not
based on feelings
but on facts.
The Bible has
those facts.*

Trying to be a good person. "I'm trying hard to be a decent person. I treat others as I want them to treat me. Isn't that the

kind of person God wants me to be? If I follow Christ's example of love, I'm sure I'll be okay on judgment day."

YOUR TURN

Suppose someone were to ask you if you are sure of your salvation. What would you say? Why? If you answer yes, then the theme of this booklet should be no surprise to you. The following pages, though, will help you to evaluate your reasons for being sure of heaven and encourage you to rely on the truths of God's Word.

If, however, you answer no or undecided, then you need to be cautioned: This booklet will challenge you to think through the issues. It is designed to offer biblical answers to help you sort out the facts and evaluate your feelings.

BLUEPRINT FOR ASSURANCE

How can you know *anything* for sure? For example, if you lived in a region prone to earthquakes, how could you be sure that the place you called home wouldn't collapse today or tomorrow? It would be reassuring to examine the blueprint of the house or apartment building where you lived and find that the foundation, walls, and roof were designed to be strong and trustworthy—even able to withstand a severe earthquake.

In a similar way, how do you know your hope of heaven will hold up when God's earth-shattering judgment comes? It would be reassuring to have some evidence that your hope is not merely wishful thinking. Such evidence is available to us. The New Testament letter of 1 John describes

the evidences that can give us strong assurance. If we picture those evidences as elements of a blueprint, we will see how each part adds strength to the complete structure.

The six elements that are described in John's blueprint for assurance are:

- The Bible's Authority
- Christ's Work
- Your Faith In Christ
- Your Obedience To Christ
- Your Love For Other Christians
- The Spirit's Assurance

The diagram that we will be using throughout this study pictures the logical progression of truths that are essential for one to be able to say he is sure of his salvation. The foundation on which our other reasons for assurance must rest is the authority of God's Word. Standing on the foundation are four supporting pillars. Each pillar represents

evidence that our salvation is secure. The finished work of Christ and our personal faith in Him are solid reasons to have assurance. The Bible also tells us that our obedience to Christ and our love for fellow Christians are evidences of true, saving faith. The capstone resting on the pillars is the inner assurance that the Holy Spirit gives to us. The Spirit points to the truths of God's Word, the sufficiency of Christ's work, the reality of our faith, and the evidences of our obedience and love.

FOUNDATION: The Bible's Authority

A solid foundation is essential to any belief. Like a building, it must be on unshakable ground. This was illustrated when a major power company was erecting a nuclear power plant. Millions of dollars were spent on the massive structure that would house the nuclear reactor. But inspection showed the foundations to be inadequate. As a result, the safety of the community was uncertain and the project had to be abandoned.

God intends for Christians to be sure of their salvation. For that reason, He has established



a solid bedrock of truth—the many statements of assurance that are found in Scripture. One of the key sections of the Bible that addresses this issue of bedrock certainty is found in the New Testament letter of 1 John. The opening words of John’s epistle make his purpose very clear. He wrote:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is

with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full (1 Jn. 1:1-4).

The first thing John wanted to establish was that everything he wrote about Christ could be trusted. Second, he desired that his readers would share with him in the joy of their salvation.

“Faith does not feed on thin air but on facts.”
Os Guinness

The apostle’s words were appropriate not only for his first-century readers but also for us today. Because of what God inspired John to write in his first letter, we can know what it takes to please God and we can be sure of forgiveness and peace with God.

As John was about to conclude his epistle, he again reminded his readers to pay attention to what he had written. He told them:

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life (1 Jn. 5:13).

John let his readers know that what he recorded would give them great assurance. From what the apostle has told us, as

of God's inspired Word.

For the purpose of our study in this booklet we will concentrate primarily on the assuring truths that John mentioned in his short letter.

Thinking It Over.

What happens to a house built on a sandy beach when strong winds and high waters beat against it? Why don't emotional feelings make a good foundation on which to build assurance of our salvation? Have you

ASSURING WORDS

- "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn. 6:40).
- "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (Jn. 10:28).
- "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

well as what we read in the rest of Scripture, we know that the foundation for our faith is found in the pages

had doubts about your relationship with God? Why do tough circumstances have a way of making us

doubt what God has said? Are you now willing to accept the Bible as “bedrock” truth on which to base the assurance of your salvation?

PILLAR I: Christ’s Work

funds from the now healthy bank account.

What about our spiritual account with God? Jesus has done all that is necessary to provide complete salvation for every person who has ever lived or ever will live. The huge



If you were unemployed and owed \$90,000 to a bank, you would probably feel that the situation was hopeless. But what if a billionaire told you that he would cover your debt and deposit \$1 million into your account? What more could you do to clear up your debt? Nothing more than accept the gift and draw

debt of sin has been paid. And that includes you, no matter how deeply or how often you have sinned.

It Satisfies God's Demands. The apostle John wrote that Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient to meet God's holy demands for justice. Because God is perfect, He cannot tolerate sin (1 Jn. 1:5-6). But there

is hope for sinful man.

John stated:

He Himself [Jesus Christ] is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2).

The word *propitiation* carries the meaning of satisfying God's justice. God's nature demanded that He do something about our sin. Yet what He did was to show us mercy instead of the judgment we deserved. God sent His only Son to take our sin upon Himself and become the object of God's wrath against sin. If we have received Christ's offer of forgiveness, then we are forgiven and no longer have to fear eternal punishment for sin.

In the Old Testament, God said, "It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11). The blood of animals could never provide the all-

sufficient sacrifice. The Old Testament sacrifices pointed forward to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

It Is Finished.

The great truth of 1 John concerning the all-sufficient work of Jesus Christ is emphasized throughout the New Testament. On the cross Jesus said, "It is finished!" (Jn. 19:30). He knew that He had emptied the cup of God's wrath. His work was done. It is so complete that God requires nothing more from us to be added to that sacrifice—no personal merit, no religious ritual, no exhausting work. All we need to do is trust ourselves to Him!

It Is Offered To Us.

John told us, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 Jn. 5:12). Jesus offers new spiritual life to all who will believe in Him

(Jn. 7:37-38). Because Christ has defeated sin and death through His atoning sacrifice and His victorious resurrection, we can be restored to God. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ covers all our sin, gives us acceptance with God, releases us from bondage, delivers us from wrath, and enables us to stand unblemished in God's presence.

God wants you to rest on the finished work of Christ. His sacrifice has infinite value. Salvation is available to all who will accept the gift. The apostle Paul wrote:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

If we accept Christ's offer, we can exclaim with the apostle Paul, "Thanks be to God for His

indefinable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

"The gospel is not a set of swimming instructions for a drowning man, but a pardon and reprieve from death for a man who does not deserve it."

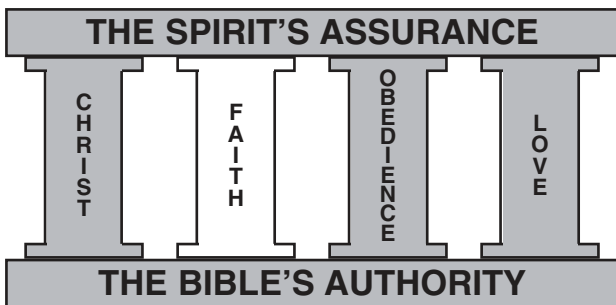
Paul Little

Thinking It Over.

What have you been trusting to make yourself acceptable to God and to help you gain entrance to heaven? Could you pay the price for your sin by being good enough? Thank God for all He has done for you to make your salvation possible.

PILLAR 2: Your Faith In Christ

Christ. When we speak of faith in Christ, we mean a



If you wanted to fly from New York to Paris, you would go to the airport, buy a ticket, and get on the plane. It wouldn't do you any good to sit around saying, "Yes, I know the airplane is trustworthy and the pilot is well-trained, and I will get to Paris if I get on board." You need to board the plane. It's not enough to know the truth; you have to do something about it. The same is true if you want to go to heaven.

What Is Faith? Faith involves a response to the truth we know about Jesus

personal expression of trust and dependency on Him. It is not enough to acknowledge intellectually that Jesus is the only One who can take us to heaven. It is not enough to know that what He did was sufficient to pay the penalty for our sin. We must put our trust in Him, accept His offer, and place ourselves in His hands.

In 1 John 5:1 we read, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Your faith in Jesus Christ—your belief that He is indeed the Christ, the Son of God—is what God

requires for you to become a member of His family.

John also told us, “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God” (1 Jn. 4:15). People may view Jesus as the greatest man who ever lived, as the supreme example for us to follow, or as the most impressive revealer of God’s love. But if they do not confess Him to be the Son of God, they are not saved.

What Does Faith Prove? Your belief in Jesus Christ is positive evidence that the Holy Spirit has given you new life. A person who is hostile or unreceptive to Christ shows no evidence of the Spirit’s life-giving activity. John wrote:

By this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us (1 Jn. 3:24). By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come

in the flesh is of God (1 Jn. 4:2).

The apostle Paul stated, “No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). Now, we all know that anyone can say the words “Jesus is Lord.” But Paul is referring to more than just producing these sounds. He means that no one can call Jesus “Lord” as the expression of his deep inner conviction “except by the Holy Spirit.”

Where Does This Leave You? Maybe you are troubled by the suspicion that your profession of faith wasn’t real. We have all seen examples of this. A young man goes through the motions of accepting Christ because a girl he wants to date has said she won’t go out with him until he becomes a Christian. Sometimes people profess faith in Jesus Christ in a moment of deep emotional turmoil and then forget

about it the next morning.

If you are not sure that your faith is real, evaluate why you feel that way. It could be that your former expression of faith was indeed shallow and not from the heart. It could be that

“We are told that Christ was killed for us, that His death has washed out our sins, and that by dying He disabled death itself. That’s the formula. That’s Christianity. That’s what has to be believed.”

C. S. Lewis

you never really understood all that Christ has done for you until now and you didn’t realize that you couldn’t earn

your way to heaven. If so, take time now to put your trust completely in Christ for your salvation. Anchor your faith on what the Bible tells us about Christ.

Maybe you can point back to a definite time in your life when you sincerely decided to put your trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. If so, your present doubts may be more a matter of unreliable feelings than a dependable indicator of your true spiritual condition. In this kind of situation, the fact that you are genuinely concerned is a very encouraging sign.

If you acknowledged your sin and admitted your need of forgiveness, and if you asked Him to save you, believing that Christ paid the penalty for all your sins, you have done all that God requires. You can be sure you are saved. Trust God’s promise. Thank God for your salvation. And when

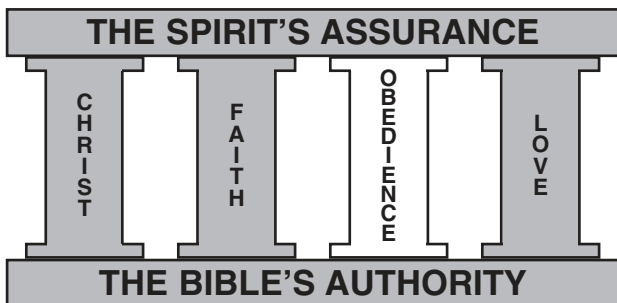
future doubts come, talk to God about them and reflect on what the Bible has to say.

Thinking It Over. Do you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for your sins? Are you trusting in His finished work for your salvation? Are you resting on what the Bible says? If you can say yes to those questions, what should you do when doubts about your salvation begin to trouble you? If you have professed faith in Christ, have you seen evidence in your life that you are a child of God?

PILLAR 3: Your Obedience To Christ

Some police departments have a canine division made up of dogs specifically trained for police work. It is amazing to watch these animals in action. The dogs have a special relationship with the person they are trained to work with. They have a strong sense of loyalty, and they respond quickly to their masters' orders. Whether they are walking down the street or running after a criminal, there is no doubt whom these dogs belong to. The police dog's quick obedience to his master's voice reveals his identity.

In a similar way, those



who believe in Jesus Christ should be easily identified by their obedience to their Lord and Master. This obedience is marked by keeping His commands and by turning from sin.

Keeping His Commands. As we look again to 1 John, we read:

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments (1 Jn. 2:3).

This verse tells us that we who have accepted Jesus as our Savior can be sure that our salvation is genuine because of our obedience to Him.

Maybe you have a solid grasp of the doctrinal truth about the finished work of Jesus Christ and you have accepted Him as your Savior, but you still have times when you doubt that your faith is anything more than mere head knowledge. Maybe you are encouraged that your concern about

your spiritual state is evidence that your faith is real—but you would like a little more tangible evidence. Well, here it is: Look at your conduct! Apply the test, “Do I keep God’s commandments?”

“The man that believes will obey; failure to obey is convincing proof that there is not true faith present.”

A. W. Tozer

It shouldn’t be hard for you to determine whether or not your life is marked by obedience. We are not suggesting, of course, that you must keep all of Christ’s commandments perfectly. No one does. The apostle John in this epistle had already spoken strongly against people who say, “we

have no sin” (1:8) and “we have not sinned” (1:10). He had already told us about God’s gracious provision of daily forgiveness and cleansing through confession (1:9). Yet all the while he made it clear that a believer’s life is to be characterized by righteousness rather than by sin. Take an honest assessment of your life. If you realize that you do love the Lord Jesus and are walking in obedience to Him, you may take that as an indication that you are born again.

Remember, you don’t need to be perfect. And your salvation is not based on obedience. But if you genuinely want to obey the commands of Christ, and if you see evidence of your growth in holiness, you will have one more reason to believe that you are truly saved.

Turning From Sin. The other side of our

obedience to Christ is a rejection of sin in our lives.

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth (1 Jn. 1:6). Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God (1 Jn. 3:6-9).

These verses may sound like John is saying that we must be perfectly sinless

before we can be sure of heaven. But that's not what he's saying. His emphasis is that we who have professed faith in Christ have passed from death to life, from darkness to light. If a person claims to be a Christian but continues to live in sin—disobeying Christ's commands and living like an unbeliever—then such a person is deceived.

A believer's life is not to be characterized by sin but by doing what is right in God's eyes. In other words, what John was saying is this: If you profess faith in Christ, then your life will show it. You will not indulge in sinning as a way of life.

John had mentioned the cleansing that is available for Christians who do sin (1 Jn. 1:9). Although a Christian will sin, sin will not have mastery over him and he will not give himself to a decadent way of life (Rom. 6:11-14).

Our obedience to Christ, then, has its positive and negative aspects: We are to keep Christ's commands,

*If our lives
are marked by
obedience to
Christ, it is another
powerful reason
to be sure we
belong to Him.*

and we are to turn from sin. If our lives are marked by this kind of obedience, it is another powerful reason to be sure we belong to Christ.

Thinking It Over.

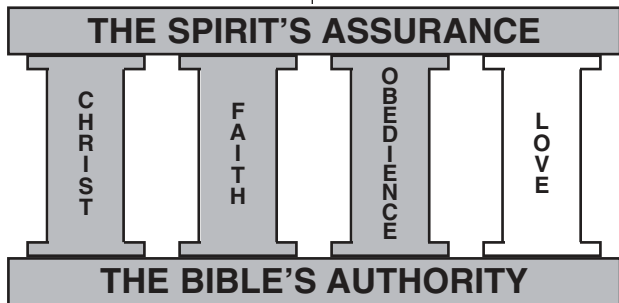
When you read the Bible or hear it taught, are you quick to obey God's commands? List some ways your life demonstrates that you are a child of God, related to Jesus Christ. If you know you have put your trust in Christ but you

have been walking disobediently, ask God for forgiveness right now and express your new commitment to obey Him.

PILLAR 4: Your Love For Other Christians

We Are Different.

Those of us who believe in Jesus Christ, though, are to be different. We should love Him first and foremost, and we should be drawn together by that common interest. But the Bible says we should go



In many pursuits of life, people are bonded together by a love for something, but not necessarily for each other. For instance, members of a baseball team may not like each other, but they play together because of their love for the game. Or members of an orchestra may never speak to one another, but they meet together because of their love for music.

beyond that. We are not only to love Christ, but we are to love one another. In fact, our love for fellow Christians is so important that it is another reason on which we can base our assurance. Look again at the words of 1 John:

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. . . . 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 (3:14,18-19).

John said that your love for other Christians will give you the assurance that you are a member of God's family. This is a characteristic that should be obvious to detect in your life. You may have some uncertainty, though, about exactly what kind of love John had in mind. The word *love* standing all by itself can mean many things to many people. But when John spoke of our love for believers, he was quite specific.

We Are A Family.

John used the word *love* to describe the sense of oneness that fellow believers have in Christ. Notice that he specifically mentioned loving "the brethren," and that he used the term *brother*

six times (see 3:13-17). True, the Bible makes it clear that Christians are to have love for all mankind, desiring the salvation of everyone. But the apostle John here was saying that our love for other Christians is an evidence of salvation. He called our attention to the fact that we are a family. We love one another in a special way because we are brothers and sisters in Christ. The whole concept of "fellowship" in this first epistle carries the idea of sharing. And that sharing flows out of our sense of oneness in Christ.

Do you enjoy being with Christians? Do you derive pleasure from talking with them about your common salvation? If so, you can take it as further evidence that you are a child of God.

We Are To Be Self-Sacrificing. This brother/sister kind of love is not merely a subjective feeling that Christians are to have

for one another. It is an active love. It is self-sacrificing. The pattern is Jesus' sacrificial love for us.

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 Jn. 3:16-17).

Unselfish, sacrificial, Christlike love is one of the pillars on which assurance rests. The apostle John, after calling for a love-filled life and defining what it means, made the statement, "By this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him" (3:19). This should give you assurance.

Thinking It Over.

Do you love Jesus Christ? Do you love His spiritual family? Read 1 Corinthians

13:4-6 and review the characteristics of love. Read Philippians 2:1-11 and notice the relationship between our union with Christ and our love for our fellow believers. Are there walls of bitterness that are keeping you from loving another believer? Take steps today to remove the barriers to brotherly love.

CAPSTONE: The Spirit's Assurance

Imagine for a moment that you are the pilot of a small plane. As you travel along, you can check your progress by looking down to find familiar landmarks, or you can look at the plane's navigational instruments. It would be disturbing if the compass said you were on course but the landscape looked unfamiliar, or vice versa. But when the instruments and the visible landmarks agree, you are reassured



that you are flying on course to your destination.

When we talk about the Spirit's assurance, we are talking about an inner confirmation that we are children of God. The person who believes the Bible knows that he has become God's child through faith. But this person also has the confirming presence of the Holy Spirit. In 1 John we read:

By this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us (3:24). He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself (5:10).

Confirming What We Know. Our own spirit may tell us that we are children of God because our assurance is built on the five reasons we have already considered:

- The Bible's Authority
- Christ's Work
- Our Faith In Christ
- Our Obedience To Christ
- Our Love For Other Christians

The Holy Spirit confirms in our heart what we already believe to be true. In fact, we know that the Spirit is involved in every step of this process. It is the Spirit who helps us to acknowledge the

truth of God's Word. The Spirit helps us to recognize the finished work of Christ. The Spirit assures us that our faith is genuine. When we live obediently to the Lord, He encourages us to continue. And it is the Spirit who produces in us the love for our fellow believers and assures us that this love is a mark of a Christian.

Cooperating With Our Spirit. Our experience squares with Romans 8:16, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Notice, the text does not say that the Spirit witnesses *to* our spirit, but rather He witnesses *with* our spirit. This means that He strengthens the witness we are already receiving from our own spirit.

Producing Inner Peace. Man-made religions or philosophies can help people face tragedy and death with

courage. They can even induce some to give their lives for a cause. But they do not enable their followers

"You did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."
Romans 8:15-16

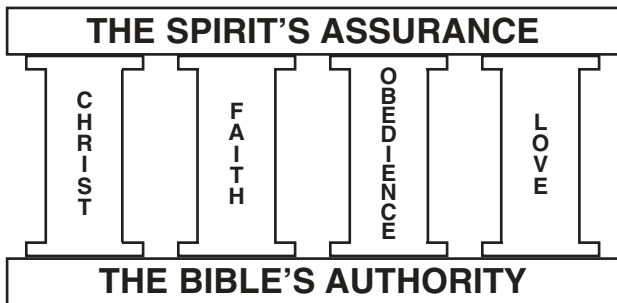
to say that trouble, persecution, famine, nakedness, death, spiritual powers, anything that has happened or will happen, nor any physical distance could separate us from the

love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:35-39).

You can have that glad, triumphant confidence! If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, base the assurance of your salvation on what the Bible has said. Christ has met God's holy demands for you. Salvation is offered as a free gift. Recognize that your faith is all God requires from you. Then examine your life for evidences of obedience to Christ and love for other Christians. As you do these things, God will give you the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

Thinking It Over.

Take a few minutes to review the blueprint for assurance outlined in this booklet. What will happen if you base your hope of salvation on how you feel rather than on the authority of God's Word? What if you fail to remember the finished work of Christ? What if you begin to think that faith is not all God requires from you? What if you are habitually disobedient to God's clear commands? What if you fail to love your fellow Christians? How can the Holy Spirit use the Word of God to witness with your spirit?



OBJECTIONS

Even though the Bible does give us good reasons to be confident about our relationship with God and our hope for eternity, not everyone is convinced. The reasons are many. In this section we will first look at three representative people who have struggled with assurance. Then we will discuss two difficult Bible passages. Finally, we'll consider some personality factors that cause doubts in the minds of many people.

CASE STUDIES

The following true stories are representative of the kinds of problems Christians have with assurance.

Case One. An elderly lady who was on her deathbed said to her son, "I believe in Jesus Christ. I love Him and have tried to live for Him. But I have

been far from perfect. Now I can only hope my faith is acceptable to God." She died as she had lived—with a sad uncertainty.

Case Two. The owner of a small business was faithful in church attendance and was compassionate to the poor. But he never enjoyed the assurance that he would go to heaven. To a pastor he

“Right now I feel good about my relationship with God. But I don’t always have this feeling. I often find myself worrying about the future.”

said, “Right now I feel good about my relationship with God. But I don’t always have this feeling. I often

find myself worrying about the future. I'm afraid I might die right after I commit a serious sin."

He went on to cite Paul's comment about working out our salvation with fear and trembling, and then he said he was afraid he might be a castaway. He concluded, "I sure wish I could know if I'm going to heaven—but I'm afraid that's impossible."

Case Three. Another person who is having problems with certainty is a young housewife who received the Lord a few years ago and underwent a remarkable change. She believes that assurance is possible, and she longs for it. But she is plagued with feelings of doubt and fear about everything—including her relationship to the Lord.

The lack of assurance for salvation in these case histories comes from two sources: (1) their faulty interpretation of key

Scripture passages, and (2) their own emotional makeup.

DIFFICULT BIBLE VERSES

Some people want assurance, but they are troubled by the interpretation of certain passages. We will examine only two of these, trusting that we can make them models of how to interpret others that seem to contradict the doctrine of assurance.

I Corinthians 9:27.

This verse has troubled some Christians because it speaks of being disqualified after years of faithful service to Christ. Paul wrote:

I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

What did Paul mean when he spoke of being

disqualified? To answer this question, we must examine other statements the apostle made on this subject. When we read his epistles, we discover a number of passages in which he expressed his certainty. He knew that he was a child of God, an heir with Jesus Christ. He knew that nothing could separate him from God. Read the conclusion of Romans 8 and sense the atmosphere of certainty and joy. Read Philippians 1 and notice that Paul spoke of death as gain. Then read 2 Timothy, written just before he was executed. What an air of confidence! When you turn to 1 Corinthians 9:27, therefore, you must remember that this verse was written by a man who knew he was on his way to heaven.

With this in mind, let's look at the context and the meaning of the Greek word

translated "disqualified." The root word means, "that which has not stood the test." Because Paul was referring to the prizes given winners in the Olympic contests, he likely had in mind the rewards that will be given at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). He was thinking only of

***“Faith rests on the
naked Word of
God; that Word
believed gives
full assurance.”***

H. A. Ironside

being disqualified from receiving a prize. He did not want to lose his reward for service through failing to satisfy his Lord. He was not afraid of losing his salvation.

Philippians 2:12.

Paul's instruction that we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling has been unsettling to some.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but how much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Notice that Paul did not say we must work for our salvation. The Greek word translated "work out" refers to "working down to a point of completion." Paul was speaking of salvation as an ongoing process through which we grow and develop in the Christian faith.

Philippians 2:12 says nothing about gaining salvation. It refers to the maturing process in cooperation with the Lord, who "works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (v.13). The "fear and trembling" indicates the

reverential awe that should fill our hearts as we live day by day in humble dependence on the Lord and in anticipation of our future glory.

Only one conclusion can be reached: The Bible does not contradict itself in teaching the assurance of salvation.

We have looked at two Bible passages that have troubled some people who are seeking assurance. And we have seen that neither passage denies the possibility of being confident of salvation. We could demonstrate that the

same is true of other problem passages, but when the verses are rightly understood and read in the light of other portions of the Bible, the conflict is resolved. Only one conclusion can be reached: The Bible does not contradict itself in teaching that we can be sure of our salvation.

PERSONALITY FACTORS

As mentioned earlier, some people acknowledge that the Bible teaches the possibility of assurance, but they can't seem to find it for themselves. We saw an example in the young housewife we mentioned in Case 3. She confesses her sins, prays for others, seeks God's guidance, lives obediently, and shows a lot of love. Yet she often has times when she is dreadfully afraid that she is not a child of God.

Many believers are plagued with doubts. If you are among them, don't condemn yourself. Your problem relates more to your psychological makeup than to your spiritual state. Don't despair.

“When a person is in Christ, he is safe. All the devil may do is worry him.”

W. P. Loveless

Consider this illustration. A man was fishing on a quiet lake after dark. The air was still, and the moon was reflected perfectly in the water. After looking at it for a while, he whimsically cast his lure into the reflection. The image shattered into a thousand pieces. Now, had the moon

actually been broken? Of course not! The reflection had. He had only to look heavenward to assure himself that the moon was still there, shining in all of its beauty.

Likewise, the joy of a Christian's salvation can be shattered by doubt, satanic attack, unfortunate circumstances, gnawing fears, or depression. But losing the joy of one's salvation does not mean that salvation itself has been lost. The believer must look upward in faith to God and to the assurances of His Word to have his confidence restored.

If you are plagued by times of doubt, consider the following guidelines for maintaining assurance:

1. Read your Bible, especially the book of 1 John, to remind yourself of the solid foundation on which your salvation stands.

2. Communicate with God through prayer, and confess every known sin.
3. Obey God's commandments, and do what you know is right.
4. Spend time with strong Christians, and let their love help you.
5. Reach out in concern to others because you love them.
6. Recognize that your doubts and depressions may be more emotional than spiritual. This will help you avoid unnecessary feelings of guilt because of your supposed lack of faith.

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Dennis De Haan, contributing editor of Our Daily Bread, struggled with doubts about his salvation. Here's his personal account of his journey to assurance.

I first professed faith in Christ as my Savior at the age of 15. I wish I could claim that in the years since then I have never once doubted my salvation. But I can't. My experience has been more of an arduous journey of recurring doubts than a spiritual fairy tale that ends in living "happily ever after." In looking back, I see that I made the common mistake of equating assurance with a positive feeling. When I was up, I felt saved; when I was down, I felt lost.

Today, it doesn't matter just when I was saved, for I have come to see that the

assurance of my salvation is based on the unchanging Word of God and the finished work of Jesus Christ in dying on the cross to pay for my sins. My pardon and my hope are in Him—not in my changing feelings.

I am also helped in knowing that some people are by temperament more inclined to doubt than others. Some people are blessed with an optimistic nature that fills them with faith about life in general, while others are by nature introspective, cautious, fearful, and deeply sensitive. God did not make all people alike. Thomas, one of Jesus' own disciples was a doubter. Yet Jesus accepted him just as he was—doubts and all.

The Bible teaches that assurance of salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit, who bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). I find that this inner confirmation

comes as I fellowship with Christ, am obedient to the Word, and rest secure in the love of God. I must be careful not to allow hatred or ill will toward anyone to remain in my heart. When doubting, I try to take an honest inventory of my life, for God's Spirit cannot witness with my spirit when I grieve or quench Him

***“In some ways,
I’m glad for doubts,
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in Jesus.”***

through disobedience. I’ve also come to see that once I’ve confessed a sin and turned from it, I don’t need

to deal with it again. Unless, of course, I sin again.

If doubts still occur, I must resist them as I do any other temptation. In some ways, I’m glad for doubts, because they force me to decide anew that I will believe God and trust completely in Jesus. How often I’ve simply told Him, “Lord, I don’t feel saved, but I trust You anyway. Thank you for settling it all on the cross of Calvary!”

Someday all doubts will be gone and we will see our Savior face to face. But until then we walk by faith and not by sight. If we concentrate on obeying God’s Word and remembering what Christ has done for us, something wonderful will occur. Slowly but surely we will begin to “doubt our doubts and believe our beliefs”—and that, through the witness of the Holy Spirit, brings blessed assurance.

ASSURANCE CHECKLIST

If you have received Christ as your Savior, the assurance of your salvation will be continually strengthened when you are able to answer yes to the following questions:

- Do I enjoy fellowship with God, with Christ, and with other believers? (1 Jn. 1:3-4).
- Am I troubled when I sin or when I see it in others? (1 Jn. 1:5-10).
- Do I try to be obedient to the commands of the Bible? (1 Jn. 2:3-5).
- Do I reject the wrong values of our present world-system? (1 Jn. 2:15).
- Do I love Christ and look forward to His return? (2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Jn. 3:2-3).
- Do I practice sin less than before I was a Christian? (1 Jn. 3:5-6).
- Do I show love to other believers? (1 Jn. 3:14).
- Have I had answers to prayer? (1 Jn. 3:22; 5:15).
- Am I aware of the witness of the Holy Spirit to the truths of God? (Rom. 8:15-16; 1 Jn. 4:13).
- Can I discern between spiritual truth and error? (Jn. 10:3-5,27; 1 Jn. 4:1-6).
- Do I believe the basic doctrines of the Christian faith? (1 Jn. 5:1).
- Have I ever experienced opposition because of my Christian convictions? (Jn. 15:18-20; Phil. 1:28).

(Adapted from *Salvation Is Forever* by Robert Gromacki.)



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