

## QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

### 2 Is it Possible to Be Sure of Salvation?

The question of full assurance of salvation has been asked again and again though expressed differently by different people. I believe that it is a very important question because uncertainty about one's relationship with God will make it impossible to progress in the Christian life or communicate a vital and living faith to others. Yes, it is possible to have a strong, certainty of salvation in the present, and, in fact, God desires us to have this assurance. Unfortunately, not all believer's have this settled peace with God. I am thinking of people who believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and who recognize that salvation can only be found in Christ. yet positive language is not in the vocabulary of this kind of Christian, and their experience of Christ is a shadowy and vague one. This kind of Christianity is little more than a gamble with the fingers crossed that everything will turn out all right in the end. My friends, we have not so learned Christ. Biblical faith is far from being a gamble. It is taking a stand upon a rock that cannot be moved as Paul instructed young Timothy, *"The solid foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His."* (II Tim.2:19) Our object in answering this question is to help anyone without assurance of salvation to turn away from everything that is of self and to exercise total reliance upon all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done. Herein lies the secret of boldness in claiming eternal life. Let us look first at some of the ways that the word *"assurance"* is used in Scripture.

#### I. ASSURANCE UNTO ALL MEN:

In his great sermon given to the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill, the apostle Paul makes mention of what is the real ground for assurance of salvation. After pointing out the utter folly of worshipping unknown gods, he declares, *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent; because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."* (Acts 17:30-31) The point here is that the resurrection of Christ is the proof that sin has been properly dealt with. Romans 4:25 teaches, *"He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."* Thus God announced to all created intelligences His full approval of Christ's work. The resurrection of Christ is our

assurance that our record is now clear. When Satan throws your sins up to you, cast a look at the bleeding form of Jesus upon the cross and do not fail to remember that His lifeless form was placed in a tomb that was empty three days later. If one of your sins or mine was not adequately cared for, Jesus would not be our Savior in the glory today. Our assurance is not wishful thinking, it is grounded in the resurrection.

## II. FULL ASSURANCE OF UNDERSTANDING:

The expression "*full assurance of understanding*" is found in Colossians.2:2, "*That their hearts might be knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.*" The initial matter of salvation having been settled the believer is not to suppose that there is nothing more to know. It is essential however that knowledge be rooted and grounded in Christ and not in man's understanding. (Colossians.2:3-8)

One of the things we must be certain to understand is that God cannot lie and when He promises eternal life to the believer He does not mean six days, months, or years. (Titus 1:2) If it is six years then it can be lost. God's eternal life is a quality of life imparted to the Christian as he is identified with Christ. It is more than a duration by which we measure mere existence. Now, it is rash and arrogant for the Christian to doubt God at this point. In fact, the person who denies the reality of salvation and the assurance of possessing eternal life makes God a liar. The apostle John wrote, "*He that believeth on the Son, of God hath the witness in himself: He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. and this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son,*" (1 John 5:9-13)

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse tells of an interesting experience regarding the witness of God and the witness of man. He writes, "A few years ago I was preaching to a French-speaking congregation. One Sunday morning I took as my subject the doctrine of the new birth. In the course of the message I said: "I know that I have been born again. I know that I have eternal life. Believers have the right to know that they will be in Heaven, so I am sure that I will be there." The next morning the bell in the corridor clanged and soon the concierge brought to my office a young man in the uniform of the Belgian army. He wore the stripes of an adjutant. He had been in church the day before, and immediately began speaking of the manner in which I had presented my

message. "Monsieur, le Pasteur," he said, "your assurance frightens me! If you had said, 'I hope I am saved,' 'I am trying to be saved,' 'I am doing the best I can to be saved,' 'I hope that I shall be in Heaven,' then I could understand. But for you to say so dogmatically, 'I know I am saved; I am sure I will be in Heaven,' your assurance frightens me!" I looked at him and said, "Adjutant, are you married?" With some surprise he answered: "Oh yes, I am!" Immediately, I retorted: "Adjutant, your assurance frightens me! If you had said: 'I hope I am married,' 'I am trying to be married.' Then I would understand. But for you to say right out, 'I am married,' well, your assurance frightens me!" "Oh, but, it is not the same thing." "Why isn't it the same thing?" I asked him. "Didn't you go to the City Hall and get married? How do you know that it was the mayor who performed your ceremony? How do you know that the mayor was not sick that morning, and that the janitor did not take his place?" He looked at me non-plussed, and said, "But I am quite sure that it was the mayor!" "But, how do you know?" I insisted. "For would you really be married if the man who performed the ceremony were a substitute, an impostor? Would the marriage certificate be valid if the name were a forgery? Would you be married?" "Well, no", he hesitated, "but I am sure that it was the mayor." "In other words, you have faith in a man and a document. Your assurance that you are married depends on the identity of the man and the validity of the document. Now I have no doubt whatever that the real mayor married you and that your marriage is real. But I want you to see that, while there may be doubt concerning your marriage, there can be no doubt concerning my salvation. My assurance, depends not on myself, but upon that Man, Jesus Christ. This Bible is my certificate of eternal union with Him. I look to the cross and see Him dying. Is He an impostor, or is He the eternal God, made flesh in order to die in my place? Now, as long as He is who He says He is, and as long as this Book is what He claims it to be, then I may be persuaded that nothing can ever separate me from His love, and since one epistle was written that we might know that we have eternal life, I am going to continue to say, "I know that I have eternal life. To put it any other way would be to cast aspersions upon the truthfulness of God."

### III. MUCH ASSURANCE:

*"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." (1 Thess.1:2-7)* One of the earmarks of gospel preaching under the anointing of the Holy Spirit is assurance. Another is joy. The bane of

evangelical Christianity today is its lack of certainty. Thousands of sermons are preached in myriads of churches which leave people with no more confidence than before they came under the hearing. Paul's preaching was such that it produced assurance. A little band of itinerant preachers planted a flag for the gospel in a pagan community with the result that people came to the faith in great numbers and began to talk with confidence about God. The word here is "plerophia" and it means "full conviction." It is interesting to note that these converts turned from idols to *"serve the living God."* (I Thess.1:10) There is no question that doubt and disobedience are closely related. On the other hand, Jesus equated assurance with doing the will of God when he said. *"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."* (John 7:17)

#### **IV. ASSURANCE OF HEART:**

*"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him."* (I John 3:18-19) It is very interesting to me that assurance of heart is associated with love. There is one aspect of love that we seldom think of, and that is loving ourselves. You recall the words of Jesus, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* (Mark 12:31) Bill Gothard in his Institute of Basic Youth Conflicts describes four areas in which people reject themselves and must learn to gain self-acceptance. These are appearance, abilities, parentage, and environment. Counselors have discovered that Christians who lack assurance of their salvation very often have not been able to develop a sense of self-esteem. They have an inadequate view of themselves and have not been able to *"love themselves"* as Jesus taught. Not able to accept themselves, they have difficulty in believing that God will accept them. The results of self-rejection are depression, lack of trust in God (it is impossible to fully trust a God who has given us the appearance, abilities, parentage, and environment which we will not accept.) rebellion, and an emphasis on material things. Actually, the great thing about Jesus is that He gives us the self-respect we desire and need. The Christian ought to be the most secure person in the world.

#### **V. FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH:**

*"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having a high priest over the house of God; let us draw near*

*with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*" (Hebrews 10:19-22) This is not the full assurance of an emotional experience or of a well thought out philosophy. The little boy was right when he was asked what faith was, "Faith is believing God and asking no questions." This is what faith is. It is taking God at His word.

Some people have a real problem with this matter of taking God at His Word. They engage in many different religious activities, but are left with an empty feeling that is void of confident faith. This lack of faith may be the result of many things. First, it may be the result of a wrong view of Scripture. One sure way to short circuit the connection between God and yourself is to look at the Bible as a human product. God has shut Himself up to revealing Himself through the pages of His word. Skepticism about that Word will naturally result in lack of faith. Secondly, lack of faith may be the result of not seeking God according to the way He should be sought. Dwight L. Moody frequently prayed that God would increase His faith until one day he came to read Romans 10:17, "*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" Suddenly he realized where he was wrong. He immediately immersed himself in the Scripture and his faith grew strong. There is no point in beseeching God to give us faith in some mystical way. Faith comes. It keeps coming through the vehicle God has chosen, His Word.

Dr. Clyde Narramore has suggested that there are other causes for lack of faith than those of a spiritual nature. One of the psychological causes are feelings of unworthiness. We have already mentioned the matter of self acceptance and how logical it is to conclude that if one has not pleased himself, or another other human being, surely it is presumptuous to feel that one can please God. Another cause is the opposite of this, feelings of pride. The proud person finds it difficult to admit his true condition. (1 Peter-5:5) This is often psychologically induced through lack of discipline or indulgent parents. Another cause may be depression or frequent periods of discouragement. This is an emotional mood that effects every area of a person's being. God seems so unreal and the approach to Him is not clear and is confusing. Depression breeds fear, timidity and severe self-blame. Bible reading often seems to bring a passage of condemnation rather than healing. Still another cause of lack of faith is unresolved guilt. Surely, this may prevent a person from feeling he is genuinely accepted by God. (Psalm 66:18) Fatigue and physical illness may keep a person

from a strong faith. Spiritual giants such as Abraham, David, Elijah, and the Apostle Paul had their times of poor health, discouragement and anxiety. When a person feels that it is impossible to lay hold of God personally there are often dynamic mitigating forces which may be of a mental, physical or spiritual nature. It does little good to be told that we should believe. It is important to uncover the reason for lack of faith and ability to trust God and take Him at His Word. There can be great comfort brought to such a life through the hearing of a devoted Christian whose faith has become strong with the passing of time. May God grant a full assurance of faith to all who seek it.

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