

Answers
to common
questions about
assurance of salvation

CHRISTIAN CONFIDENCE

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Introduction

The doctrine of salvation is one of the most fundamental and clear teachings in the Bible. But despite its priority and clarity in Scripture, much of Christianity has been confused by various misinterpretations of this doctrine that have accumulated since the first century. These misconceptions have been believed and taught for years. Consequently, some people are confident they're saved when there's little evidence for it. Others are unsure and fearful about their standing with God.

God intends for us to know what it is to be saved and how to be saved. Once saved, God wants us to have confidence in His Word that our salvation leads to eternal life. God also wants us to carefully heed the warnings in Scripture about what happens when someone turns away from the truth.

If you at some point confessed faith in Christ, you probably have faced questions about your faith. While new believers may be more vulnerable to doubts, older Christians, too, can face uncertainties about their salvation.

In this booklet I have given my careful, prayerful reflections on some (but far from all) of the Scriptures that address salvation and the Christian's assurance. This is not an academic dissertation or the last best word on the subject (that is always the Word of God), but rather a lay preacher's musings on a critical doctrine.

Give God the glory if you find encouragement or helpful warnings in these pages.

When questions come 1

Every person has an eternal soul and will spend eternity in Heaven or Hell. Jesus Christ is the way to Heaven, and those who believe in Him have the confidence of everlasting life. When we accept the work of Christ for redemption and are living in obedience to God, we experience a peace that passes understanding. But sometimes questions come, peace is lost, our confidence is shaken, and we are left in fear and distress.

I speak from experience. I have had doubts and questions at various times. For example:

- Satan has tempted me with questions about being forgiven.
- Deaths and funerals are always reminders that someday it will be my turn to die. Am I ready? I can be prepared and secure in my faith, but I won't know what death is like till I experience it. And as much as I know in my head that to die and be with Christ is far better, the process of dying is still unnerving to think about.
- Satan can use failure or inadequacy in fulfilling some responsibility (or the perception of it) to make me question my salvation.
- Accusations from others, whether true or false, can produce doubts about being saved.

*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;
Philippians 2:12*

*Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?
Romans 2:4*

When the questions come, they should always be considered carefully. If my heart is not at peace, there is some reason for it. Lack of peace, whether from Satan's attacks or the Holy Spirit's conviction, is serious. In one sense, it should be received as a friend in the same way a warning light on the dash of a vehicle helps us trace the source of an engine problem. (Romans reminds us it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance.) A mind that is not at rest is a checkpoint to examine my life, be honest with God, confess sin if there is sin, and go forward in faith.

Confidence and peace with God come from knowing God's Word and accepting what God says over how I feel. Feelings are emotional responses to the circumstances of life. I can no more depend on my feelings on a good day for assurance that I'm saved than I can use them on a bad day to decide I'm lost. Emotions come and go, depending on what's happening in my life; God's Word is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

In addressing assurance of salvation, there are two opposite situations.

1. The overly sensitive conscience that suffers from unwarranted doubts.
2. The insensitive conscience that needs to be warned.

Often, when the subject is addressed, we think of the overly sensitive conscience. This person has doubts but is on the right track and just needs confirmation.

He needs to adjust his thinking to claim the promises in God's Word.

But Scripture also addresses those with an insensitive or hardened conscience, warning them to hold on to their salvation with great effort. When doubts come, we should examine ourselves to make sure we are in the faith.

Both the doubting conscience that needs reassurance and the insensitive conscience that needs to be warned will be addressed in this work. The primary emphasis, however, will be on comforting the individual struggling with doubts about his salvation. Are his doubts coming because Satan wants to destroy his peace with God, or is he under conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit?

One rule of thumb for distinguishing between Satan's attacks and the Holy Spirit's conviction is this: God convicts us of specific sins and offers a clear course of action for finding peace. Satan discourages us with general accusations and no good solutions.

That being said, there are exceptions, because the overly sensitive conscience can also be very specific in its accusations.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.
Luke 13:24

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.
2 Peter 1:10

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.
2 Corinthians 13:5

What is 2 salvation?

God created man in His own image. Since God is a spirit, this created image was more about man's spirituality than his physical appearance. Man was like God in holiness, free from sin, and with an eternal soul. Adam and Eve's sin brought separation from God and damaged the image of God they had at Creation. Instead of a God-honoring life of holiness, man became self-centered.

Salvation means to be saved from sin and condemnation. It restores God's original purpose for man at Creation—to be in the image of God. Romans says all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. In the very next verse, Paul states this purpose to which we are called—to conform to the image of His (God's) Son. Salvation is the work of Jesus on our behalf to make that possible.

My brother-in-law is a skilled woodworker. He does not do mass production on an assembly line but specializes in restoring old pieces of furniture or sometimes a former mansion to its original beauty and purpose.

When the owner of a damaged piece sees the potential for restoring it to the builder's original purpose, my brother-in-law comes to the rescue. He finds the original kind of wood, and

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Genesis 1:27

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.

Romans 8:28, 29

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.

Colossians 3:10

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6

he painstakingly, gently, and lovingly crafts intricate trim patterns and doors that duplicate the original design. He matches the original finish. He loves what he does, and the finished wood carries his mark of excellence. As the owner watches the master craftsman at work, the owner is assured that the completed project will match the original. Oh, what joy when the old piece of furniture or historic home is finally restored to its original beauty!

When my brother-in-law describes his projects, his gentle voice and his passion for his work remind me

*But we . . .
with open face
beholding . . . the
glory of the Lord,
are changed into the
same image from
glory to glory.
2 Corinthians 3:18*

of how God desires to save us. He wants to restore us to His image, which was the original purpose He had for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Though sin has marred that image, Jesus is the restoring craftsman, and His excellent work provides assurance during the process, assurance that in the end we will

be restored to the image of God. Then, the redeemed of the race will once again be like Him—holy and sinless and assured of eternal life. It is a process that begins with a person's new birth and ends at his physical death or will end at Jesus' return.

What must I do to be saved?

3

Paul and Silas had been beaten, thrown into prison, and their feet fastened in stocks. At midnight, while they were praying and singing praises to God, a great earthquake shook the building, and they were miraculously set free. The jailer, afraid the prisoners had escaped, was about to commit suicide. Paul shouted to the jailer not to hurt himself because all the prisoners were there. The jailer fell in front of Paul and Silas and begged, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

The answer they gave the jailer is still true today. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Romans 10:9 says it this way: “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

Salvation is that simple—by grace through faith. It is God’s grace to me by faith in Jesus Christ. It is believing Jesus is the Son of God, who came into the world as a man, lived a perfect life, gave His blood on the cross as a sacrifice for my sin, rose from the dead, and today is at God’s right hand interceding to Him on my behalf.

When the Philippian jailer asked, “What must I do to be saved?” he was also admitting he needed a Saviour. Like the jailer, I, too, have confessed my sin and need of a Saviour and expressed my faith in Jesus. I had then met the requirements for

salvation and could say with Paul, “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” (2 Timothy 1:12). That’s assurance of salvation. I have been justified—declared to be righteous (restored to the image of God). Or in the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, I have been born again. If I die, I am assured of eternal life.

If the next day I still believe in Jesus, I still have that assurance. When I continue in faith, day after day, I establish a walk of faith that gives me the continuing assurance described in 1 John 1:7, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” While I continue to walk in the light (in faith), the cleansing from sin by the blood of Jesus continues. I continue to be justified. And I can continue to claim assurance that I am saved.

Salvation begins with that first expression of faith and the new birth. This begins the perfecting of His image in me and assures me of eternal life. But growth must follow birth. A baby may be ever so perfect at his physical birth, but parents expect their child to grow, learn, and develop into an adult. So, my new birth restores the image of God as a perfect baby in Christ but then begins a lifetime walk of faith that transforms me to become more and more like Christ. The process is only completed at the end of life. Peter says when Jesus returns (or at

*Beloved, now are we
the sons of God, and
it doth not yet appear
what we shall be: but
we know that, when
he shall appear, we
shall be like him; for
we shall see him as
he is. And every man
that hath this hope in
him purifieth himself,
even as he is pure.
1 John 3:2, 3*

death), I can be assured of, “Receiving the end of [my] faith, even the salvation of [my soul]” (1 Peter 1:9).

While salvation is ultimately realized at the end of life, God wants my confidence in its eventual fulfillment to be a daily, continual reality.