

Assurance of Salvation

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Confidence and Assurance of Salvation

God wants us to have that same confidence regarding our salvation. The apostle John wrote in 1 John 5:13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

As Paul approached the end of his life, he spoke with great confidence regarding his eternal salvation. "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:6-8)." Paul had great confidence, not in his own perfection, but in the saving grace of God.

We cannot be assured and confident if we are willfully and rebelliously living in sin.

Paul warned about the need to remain faithful in order to receive that eternal salvation. In Colossians 1:21-23, he reminds the Gentile Christians of their former life that was filled with evil. He says they are now reconciled to God and will be presented to Him "holy and blameless and beyond reproach--if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel."

In 1 Corinthians 9:25, he admonished the Corinthian church to exercise self-control in all things. Paul then spoke of himself in verse 27 and said, "I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified (KJV: "should be a castaway")."

In chapter 10, Paul further warns them about those who fell because of their disobedience (see Numbers 25:1-9) and tells them in verse 12, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." Finally, he encourages them in 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

Paul warned Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:18-20 to continue to "fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience." He spoke of Hymenaeus and Alexander, two who apparently failed to do so, but rather "rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith."

In Galatians 5:1-4, Paul warned those who were tempted to turn back to keeping the Law. He declared that they would then be "under obligation to keep the whole Law." To those who would do so, he said, "You have been severed from Christ; you have fallen from grace." If one no longer has access to grace and is not able to perfectly keep the law, how can there be salvation?!

The apostle Peter warned about falling from salvation in 2 Peter 2:20-22: "For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandments delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire.'"

Surely those mentioned here were at one time in a saved condition. They had "escaped the defilements of the world [through] Christ." They had "known the way of righteousness." They had been faithful to "the holy commandments," but they turned away and went back to a life of sin. Peter says they would have been better off to have never been saved, than to have done so and then turned away. His illustration in verse 22 should be enough to show us the awfulness of making such a terrible mistake.

The Book of Hebrews was written primarily to Christians with a Jewish background. The writer's intent is to encourage them to remain faithful and not turn back to their old way of life. The Hebrew writer said in 3:6 that we are part of the house of Christ "if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end." In verses 7-11, he speaks of the children of Israel who were stubborn and rebellious. He then warns in verse 12:

"Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God." In verse 14 he said, "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end."

Hebrews 6:4-6: "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame."

Some wish to say that those described here were never in a saved relationship in the first place. To believe such, though, is to ignore the most obvious sense of the passage. The writer lists 5 specific characteristics that clearly apply only to saved Christians. The Bible teaches that Christians are enlightened; Paul says, "[We] were formerly darkness, but now [we] are light in the Lord [and are to] walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8)." To taste of the heavenly gift must surely include forgiveness of sins, justification, and all that pertains to our present and eternal salvation. And the Bible teaches clearly that it is those in a saved relationship with Christ who receive the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17; Romans 8:9-11; 1 Cor 3:16; Galatians 4:6).

The writer here speaks of a truly hardened apostate who has completely turned away the faith and refuses to repent and confess his sin. Such a one, the Bible says, has fallen away and has, in effect, become guilty of once again crucifying the Son of God. To say that such a one was never truly saved is to contradict the very point being made. The writer heaps clause upon clause to show that there was once a genuine saved relationship with the Lord. And it is that fact which makes it impossible to renew them when they do fall away so completely.

The author of Hebrews also warns in 10:26, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." The warning here is not to the faithful Christian walking in the light who continually confesses his sin. The warning is to the one who willfully and deliberately has decided to reject Christ and persist in sin without any intention of repenting of such. There is certainly a difference between the two (see Numbers 15:22-31 about sins done in ignorance and sins done intentionally).

This warning is to one who was once saved; such a one had received a knowledge of the truth and had been cleansed by the sacrifice of Christ. In verse 29, we are told that the one had "by the blood of the covenant [been] sanctified." But the writer states clearly that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is no longer available or applicable to one who has thus turned away. There is no longer a cleansing for one who will not repent and confess his sin. There is, for such a one, "a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries (verse 27)."

Later in the same chapter, in verses 35-38, the writer says, "Do not throw away your confidence." He says, "You have need of endurance [if you are to] receive what was promised." And he warns once again, if we "shrink back," then God "has no pleasure in him."

We cannot be assured and confident if we trust in ourselves.

Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." No one can stand before God and say, "Look how good I am. I deserve salvation." Because no one does! Christians work hard at overcoming sin, we strive to obey every commandment, to grow more and more, we study and we try to do everything just the way God would have us to do, we fill our lives with good deeds. And we should be doing all these things. But the fact remains: No matter how good we may be at all these things, we're never going to deserve salvation by our own merits.

You can stand before God and say, "Look, here is my list of sins that I've overcome! I deserve to be saved; I've worked so hard and I hardly ever sin now." That's great; but hardly ever sinning is not good enough if you're going to depend on yourself for salvation. James 2:10 says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." Being really, really good is still not good enough; you'll still fall short of perfection.

And you can hold up that list of all your good deeds as well, but they're not going to make you deserving of anything either. Isaiah 64:6 says, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like filthy garments."

You're just not going to be good enough on your own. And if you've placed your hope and confidence in yourself and how good you are, then you really have no reason to have any hope or confidence!

We can be assured and confident if we trust in Jesus Christ.

Yes, we are going to fall short and we won't be good enough on our own. But there is good news. The good news is that Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.... I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12-13).

We may still be sinners, but if we are in Christ, then we have a great reason to hope.

1 John chapter 5:11-12 Salvation is for those in Christ.

Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ."

Ephesians 2:8-9 Not of yourselves; something only God can do through Christ.

John 14:6 Jesus Himself said that He is the only way.

Philippians 3:4-9 Paul talks about having confidence in himself, in his own flesh. If anyone could do so, he could. He goes on to list all his good qualities, but he knew he couldn't be righteous on his own; recall he referred to himself as "the least of all saints" and "the chief of sinners"; he wasn't planning on standing before God and saying, "Look, it's me, Paul!" The only way Paul was going to get into Heaven is the same way for every one of us: by trusting in the blood of Jesus Christ! Look at v8-9...

It's not how good we are, but how good God is; it's not our perfection, but Christ's perfection! There is no reason to have confidence in ourselves because we will always fall short. But there is every reason to be confident when we have placed our trust in Jesus Christ.

Remember the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer (in Luke 18:9-14)? The Pharisee proudly stood before God and boasted of how good he was: "I thank You that I am not like other people..." Meanwhile, the lowly tax-gatherer would not even look up towards heaven, but he beat upon himself and said, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"

The Pharisee had no reason to be confident because he trusted in his own goodness; the publican, the tax-gatherer could be confident because he trusted in God's goodness. We can't be confident if we trust in ourselves, but we can be assured and confident if we put our trust in Jesus Christ.

We can be assured and confident that we are in Christ.

We know that salvation is in Christ, and we know that when we became Christians we were clothed in Christ. But how confident are you that you're still in Christ? How can you be sure that God doesn't consider you outside of Christ?

Look again at 1 John; remember he said he wrote so that we can know... throughout this book he reminds us of the evidence of being in Christ...

Remember the Bible says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). If you're not sure if you're in Christ, look at your life. Is it different? John talks about these changes and how they prove that we are in Christ so that we can indeed be confident of our salvation.

1. 1 John 2:3-6 People in Christ will always seek to obey God's commands. Jesus said in John 14:15 says, "If you love me, you will keep..."
2. 1 John 2:22-28 People in Christ still believe in Jesus as the divine Son of God.

3. 1 John 3:6-10a People in Christ strive to overcome sin; they have a much different attitude about sin (not sinless, but...). Good News Translation: "continues to sin"; New Century Version says, "So anyone who lives in Christ does not go on sinning." (1:6-7 "walking in the light"; also Romans 8:13-17 "putting to death" the sin in our lives)
4. 1 John 3:14 (19-21); 4:12-13, 16-18 People in Christ will love one another.

All these things serve as a reminder and proof to those of us who might otherwise doubt that we are indeed in Christ and headed towards our heavenly home. We have every reason to be assured and confident of our salvation.

We can be assured and confident that we will always be in Christ.

Yes, as already mentioned, it is indeed possible for a person to fall away to the point of being lost. However, while it is possible, it does not seem probable! It seems much more likely that the vast majority of Christians will stay faithful to the Lord. Yes, we may stumble at times; some of us may be growing more than others, but few of us will actually cease to believe in Christ, reject Him as Savior, and rebel and return to a life of sin.

We got into Christ through our faith and surely most of us will maintain our faith in Christ despite our shortcomings.

Consider a couple of passages about how we got into Christ: Galatians 3:26-27 and Colossians 2:12. What do these two passages have in common? They both mention baptism into Christ, but they both also mention faith! The Bible teaches that baptism is the point in time at which God washes away our sins (we don't do it, He does), but it is our faith that changes baptism from getting wet to a rebirth wrought by God! Water cannot save; the blood of Jesus does through the grace of God and through our faith.

So what will keep us in Christ? The same thing that got us into Christ: our faith! It is our faith that is the foundation for our entrance into Christ and it is our faith that will sustain us and keep us in Christ.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have kept the faith." He maintained his faith and trust in the Lord; he chose to become a follower of Christ and to live for Him and he never turned back. He was therefore confident that he was still clothed in the blood of Christ, and I think we too can be confident in that very same thing.

God wants us to have that confidence; He wants us to trust in His grace and His promises. We may do a lot of awful things, we may fail to do a lot of good things, we may fail to rightly understand some things, but as long as through faith we keep holding on to Christ, He'll keep holding on to us!!!

Paul wrote to Timothy: "I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (2 Timothy 1:12). We too need to have that same trust and confidence in the Lord; we too need to be able to say: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith, and therefore I know there is laid up for me that crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day.