

Assurance of Salvation

by John Edmiston

Walking In the Spirit – Series 46 (A Ministry of Eternity Christian Fellowship)

There are two extreme views about the assurance of salvation. One is the “I once prayed a prayer so I am saved forever no matter what I do, or how I live” extreme. This approach does not take the righteous requirements of the gospel seriously enough. It is just lawlessness “baptized” with a quick prayer. The other extreme is “you are only as saved as your last act of obedience”. That is salvation by works and is establishing your own righteousness (Romans 10:1-3). It has people saved one minute and unsaved the next. One preacher is noted for saying “I kicked my toe on a rock and nearly lost my salvation”. That is just plain ridiculous! It runs against the entire teaching on the NT especially John, Romans and Galatians.

John 10:27-29 EMTV *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. (28) And I give to them eternal life, and they shall never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. (29) My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.*

Assurance of salvation is not an emotion or an inner experience. How do we know that? From the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee was totally sure of his salvation (“I thank you Lord that I am not like other men..”)– but was not justified, whereas the desperate publican who had great feelings of insecurity and unworthiness (“unable to lift up his eyes toward heaven”) was the one who was justified before God. Their personal feelings were the OPPOSITE of the actual spiritual reality.

Also great Christians with melancholic personalities such as John Bunyan and Charles Spurgeon have struggled with 'feeling saved' while some glib televangelists are absolutely positive about a salvation that few other people believe that they possess!

Assurance of salvation is also not cognitive e.g. “since you believe these four bible verses you are now saved forever”. Being able to check off a list of doctrines assures us of nothing! The Devil believes that God is One, and that Jesus is Lord, and Satan knows all too well that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of mankind, was raised from the dead and will return in glory one day. But that doesn't make Satan saved.

1 John is the epistle that is most devoted to the idea of the assurance of salvation. John keeps using terms such as “know”, “assure”, “confidence” and “abide”. The apostle is telling us that we can know and be fully assured about our salvation. It is not something we have to be constantly in doubt about.

First read the seven passages below - then I will draw out the main points:

1 John 2:3-6 EMTV *Now by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. (4) He who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (5) But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. (6) He who claims to abide in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*

1 John 2:28-29 EMTV *And now, little children, abide in Him, in order that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed due to Him at His coming. (29) If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of Him.*

1 John 3:14 EMTV *We know that we have passed over from death to life, because we love the brothers. He who does not love his brother abides in death.*

1 John 3:16-24 EMTV *By this we have come to know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives in behalf of our brothers. (17) But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother having need, and shuts off his compassion towards him, how does the love of God abide in him? (18) My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. (19) And in this we know that we are from the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. (20) Because if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and He knows all things. (21) Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. (22) And whatever we should ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and we do the things pleasing before Him. (23) And this is His commandment: that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and should love one another, just as He gave commandment. (24) And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, from the Spirit whom He gave us.*

1 John 4:7-8 EMTV *Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; and everyone that loves has been born of God and knows God.*

1Jn 4:13 *(By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.)*

1 John 4:16-17 EMTV *And we have come to know and believe the love which God has in us. God is love, and he that abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (17) By this love has been perfected with us: that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because just as He is, we also are in this world.*

1 John 5:11-15 EMTV *And this is the testimony: that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (12) He that has the Son has life; he that does not have the Son of God does not have life. (13) These things I write to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may believe in the name of the Son of God. (14) And this is the*

confidence that we have toward Him, that if we should ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (15) And if we know that He hears us, whatever we may ask, we know that we have the requests that we have requested from Him.

The basis of being sure of your salvation is:

- a) That you believe in Jesus Christ (1 John 3:23) and that you 'have the Son'. He who has the Son has life (1 John 5:12).
- b) That you walk in love (1 John 3:14, 4:7-8, 16-17). This involves demonstrating generous, sacrificial, practical love for the brethren (1 John 3:16-19) which proves that God's love abides in you and that you are a new creation with a new nature in Christ. Your loving behavior is a true sign that God, who is love, is resident in your personality.
- c) That you obey to Christ's commandments (1 John 2:3-6), keeping His Word (1 John 2:5) and adopting the Jesus lifestyle ("walking as He walked" 1 John 2:6). You know you are of the truth if your lifestyle matches up with the commandments of God; which are to believe in the name of Jesus Christ and to love one another (1 John 3:23).
- d) That you practice righteousness (1 John 2:28,29). Righteousness is God's nature and is part of His image. If we are to be like Christ, then we will be righteous and our righteousness will give us confidence on the day of judgment so that we need not be ashamed because God will recognize the presence of Christ in us.
- e) Answers to prayer (1 John 3: 22). If our prayers are being answered we know that God is hearing us (1 John 5:14,15) because we are obeying His commandments and asking in His will.
- f) Having the Holy Spirit dwelling in us (1 John 3:24, 4:13 see also Romans 8:9). The presence of the Holy Spirit, which is evident in the fruit of the Spirit (such as love, joy and peace), and in the revealing of Christ to us via the anointing (1 John 2:20,27) and in the confession of Christ as Lord who has come in the flesh (1 John 4:1-3) is a sign of God's indwelling and of our salvation.
- g) A clear conscience – 'a heart that does not condemn us' (1 John 3:21). Now John tells us that this is a tricky question and that some people feel condemned even if they are guiltless (perhaps because of the work of the Accuser of the Brethren). In this case we have to look to God, not to our heart, because God is greater than our heart and knows all things (1 John 3:20). The apostle John tells us that the way we can reassure our heart if we have doubts is to check our obedience and our love (1 John 3:16-19). The objective factor – how we are living, is much surer than the subjective – how we are feeling.
- h) Abiding in Christ (1 John 2:28) – that is 'keeping our relationship with God pure and holy'. As we obey His commandments we abide in God and God abides in us (1 John 3:24) – that is the relationship between the Christian and God deepens. The

signs that we are abiding in Christ are righteousness (1 John 2:29), the Spirit (1 John 4:13) and godly love (1 John 4:16).

To sum up the signs that we are saved are: faith in Christ, obedience to His commandments, practical agape love, righteousness, answered prayer, the indwelling Holy Spirit, a clear conscience and a pure and holy relationship with God. Satan cannot show agape love, obey God, or walk in righteousness. The Devil and his servants cannot pass these eight tests. Only the sons of God can!

The first five of these are externally measurable and testable. You can check to see if you have faith in Christ, are living in agape love, obeying His commandments and walking in righteousness. It is also easy to see if your prayers are being answered. That last three (the Holy Spirit, a clear conscience and abiding in Christ) are tested by the first five. For instance, love is a sign of the Spirit, and is also a sign that we are abiding in Christ.

At no point do we have to depend on our feelings, our experiences or on a theological checklist (which is all too easy to fake). Assurance of salvation is measurable, testable, and has external proofs. The indicators of salvation are clearly evident attitudes, behaviors and lifestyle choices that we make on a consistent basis. We should be people who daily seek to be loving, righteous and holy. The Greek tenses here mean that we are tested by our general disposition, by how we live out Christ in the long-term. No one-off experience of spiritual elation can assure us of salvation and no one-off spiritual catastrophe of anger, rage or unloving behavior means that we have lost our salvation.

Do these eight signs (love, righteousness etc) mean that if we occasionally accidentally sin that we lose our salvation? Not at all! Sins and slip-ups occur with even the best of believers. We should confess them and move on confident of the cleansing of the blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7-9). We need to move past our sinful mistake and resume being righteous, loving, gracious, Spirit-filled and obedient to Christ. This is not performance based Christianity. It is fruitful living that is the outworking of deep and abundant grace. God took the initiative to save us. God is love and we love because He first loved us. God holds you in the palm of His hand and will keep you in His love!

John Edmiston

This Article – Assurance of Salvation is © Copyright AIBI-International 2010

This article may be freely reproduced for non-profit ministry purposes but may not be sold in any way and must be reproduced “as is” without alteration. Just e-mail us at johned@aibi.ph