

Assurance of Salvation

Salvation is a work of God.¹ More than that, salvation is *solely* a work of God. Assurance of salvation is possible only if salvation is a work of God alone. If salvation depended upon man's ability, assurance of salvation would require answering two questions:

1. What works are necessary to meet God's approval for righteousness?
2. How many works are necessary?

No one can answer the above questions. We have no information that will answer them. Therefore, assurance of salvation is impossible if salvation depends in any part on a person's works or good deeds. However, if salvation depends on the work of God, one *can* have assurance of salvation.

The Scriptures make it clear it is impossible for man to gain the approval of God and attain His righteousness by doing good works. Isaiah wrote, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment" (Isaiah 64.6). This is the Old Testament witness of man's righteousness before God. Paul summed up the problem when he wrote, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3.23). Only one righteous man has ever lived—Jesus Christ. Only His works satisfied God. The proof of Jesus' righteousness and the approval of His work on the cross for our sins was His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1.4). Because of Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection we can have assurance of salvation (1 Corinthians 15.1-4).

Paul declared this fact in Romans:

²¹ *But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,*

²² *even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ*

for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. ²⁷ Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law (Romans 3.21-28).

Continuing a few verses later, Paul wrote,

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. ⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness (Romans 4.1-5).

Surely this Scripture is the greatest statement of hope and comfort ever written. It declares divine righteousness is a gift—we cannot work for it. It is for the one who does *not* work. It is for the one who *believes*.

To the Galatians, Paul wrote,

“Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified ” (Galatians 2.16).

“I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly” (Galatians 2.21).

Is this clear? Salvation and God’s righteousness are available through trusting Christ—believing He died for you and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). Each of us has sinned and is unrighteous before God. Only by exercising faith in Christ’s work (His death and resurrection) can one be justified before God. No amount of good works can achieve this. It does not matter if you have all the good deeds of a Mother Teresa or an Albert Schweitzer. None of these works merit God’s approval for salvation. The only way to God is through trusting the work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

God desires that all who have put their faith in Christ *know* that they have eternal life. The Bible declares that “no condemnation” exists for the believer in Christ (Romans 8.1). The most important thing is to be saved and the second most important thing is to know it. The one who has trusted in Christ can be as certain he will be in heaven as Christ is. Is this arrogance? No. It is obeying God. It is *believing* what He has said. Is it presumptuous to depend on Christ’s righteousness? Is it arrogant to believe Christ’s work satisfied the just demands of a holy God to pay the penalty for our sins? Paul wrote the Ephesians,

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1.7).

Notice his wording. "we have redemption." God's redemption and forgiveness of our sins is not something in the future or something hoped for. It is a present possession of the believer. Salvation does not begin when one dies. Salvation begins when one believes the gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). Paul wrote similar words to the Colossians:

¹³ For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1.13-14).

Again, notice the past tense. Rescued from the domain of darkness, transferred to the kingdom of His Son, redemption, and forgiveness are past actions which become present possessions of the believer. They are not future hopes but actions God did in the past when one believed the gospel.

In the same way, eternal life is a present possession for the believer (Romans 5.21, 6.22-23; 2 Thessalonians 2.16; 1 Timothy 1.16; Titus 1.2, 3.7). Eternal life does not begin when a believer dies. It begins when he believes. Those who put their trust in Christ *have-not* will have, but *have* eternal life. Can eternal life be lost? If you have eternal life, how long does eternal life last?

Further testimony to these truths are the following Scriptures:

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2.8-9).

⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved

from the wrath of God through Him (Romans 5.8-9).

Donald Grey Barnhouse recounted the following story of assurance of salvation of an old Scottish lady:

“The story goes that a young minister came to visit in the home of an aged woman who was dying. He was recently out of theological seminary and had more theology than Bible in his head, and had not known much of the experimental joys of long and close living with the Saviour in the knowledge and power of the divine love. He was somewhat appalled at the apparent joy and certainty of the patient and began to counsel her to give diligence to make her calling and election sure. But the dear old saint had been walking with the Lord for many a year and was long past the stage of learning the ABC’s of the gospel. She gave a testimony so clear that the young man was frightened and pressed her to go back and be less presumptuous with God. She answered, ‘Young man, if I should nae be in Heaven the guid Lord would lose more that I could ever lose.’ This amazed him more than her first attitude, and he broke out at once, asking for an explanation. The old lady answered, “If I should nae be in Heaven all that I could lose would be my own soul, for that is all I have to lose. But if I should nae be in Heaven the guide Lord would lose His name and honor, for He has promised to save them to the uttermost that come to Him by Christ, and that is the way which I have come.”²

One English hymn, which expresses a believer’s security and relationship to God, reads,

*Near, so near am I to God,
Nearer I cannot be;
For in the Person of His Son,
I’m just as near as He.*

Dear, so dear am I to God,

*Dearer I cannot be;
The love wherewith He loved His Son,
Such is His love for me.*

This is hope! Once a person exercises faith in Christ and his work a new relationship begins. He becomes a child of God with direct access to Him. This new relationship was illustrated by Dr. Barnhouse in the following story:

“During student days in France, I was the pastor of a little Evangelical Reformed Church in the French Alps. Once a week I went to a neighboring village for an instruction class for its children. En route, I passed the local priest who was on a similar errand in the opposite direction. We became good friends, and often stopped to chat. Once he asked why we do not pray to the saints. I replied by asking why we should pray to the saints. He launched into an explanation that involved an illustration of how one might get an interview with the president of the French Republic. One could go to the ministry of agriculture, or through the departments of war or finance etc. and any one of the cabinet members might succeed in opening the door of the president’s office. He smiled with an air of triumph, as though to say that the simplicity and clarity of his argument would preclude any rebuttal. At that time Raymond Poincaré was President of France and lived in the Palace of the Elysée in Paris. I said, “But Monsieur le curé, suppose that I were the son of Monsieur Poincaré? I live in the Elysée with him. I get up from the breakfast table and kiss him goodbye as he goes to his office. Then I go down to the ministry of finance, for example, and ask the fourth secretary of the second assistant if it is possible for me to see the minister of finance. If I do succeed in reaching his office my request is for an interview with papa.” My friend appeared thunderstruck, and I went on to say that I am a child of God, heir of God and joint-heir with Christ, that I have been saved through the death of the Savior and thus as a son I have immediate access

to the Father.”³

We begin new life in Christ through trusting in Him and Him alone. No amount of good deeds can approve us to God. Trusting in Christ is believing what God says. The Bible says that Christ died for your sins and was raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). This is the [gospel](#). Will you believe it? Will you trust your life to what it says?

Some confuse the simple matter of trusting in Christ with unscriptural appeals to “invite Christ into your heart” or “accept Christ as your Savior.” Such appeals, while well-intentioned, are not the gospel. One is saved by trusting in the person and work of Jesus on the cross for us and in his resurrection—not by “inviting Christ into one’s heart.”

Is your trust in the Christ who died for **you** and was raised for *you*? Do you trust in Christ’s death and resurrection on *your* behalf? If the answer is “yes”, then you have God’s own word and faithfulness that you have eternal life and will spend eternity with Christ. Furthermore, salvation is not something that can be “lost” because you sin. Jesus’ death *solved* the sin problem forever. What you do or do not do has no effect on your salvation because it is Christ’s work that is sufficient before God. To believe that you can commit some sin and “lose” your salvation is to believe that your sin is greater than Christ’s work on the cross and the power of his resurrection. Such belief strikes at the very heart of Christ’s work and insults the integrity of God. The only possible way one can “lose” salvation is to reject the work of Christ.

¹ Salvation is the deliverance from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. This work is both immediate, ongoing, and future. These three aspects of salvation are expressed by theologians as justification, sanctification, and glorification. The moment one believes the [gospel](#) (1

Corinthians 15.1-4) one is delivered from the penalty of sin. God imputes his own righteousness and judicially declares the believer to be righteous in his sight (Romans 3.26, 28, 30, 4.5, 5.1). The believer is given a new nature which is alive to God. When one believes he is immediately baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 12.13) and God gives him the Holy Spirit as a deposit or down payment ([ἄρραβών](#)), 2 Corinthians 1.22, 5.5; Ephesians 1.14) for the hopeful expectation of being delivered from the power and presence of sin. The process of being delivered from the power of sin while we live on this earth is known as sanctification. The final stage of salvation is being delivered from the presence of sin and is known as glorification. This occurs when the believer receives a new, resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15.50-56).

² Barnhouse, Donald Grey, *Romans*, Eerdmans, 1959, Book 3, God's Remedy, p. 66.

³ Ibid., Book 4, God's River, pp. 27-28.

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