

# Helping People Have the Assurance of Salvation

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By John Piper August 5, 1999

**FULL ASSURANCE IS GOD'S WILL FOR US.** "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end." Hebrews 6:11

**ASSURANCE IS PARTIALLY SUSTAINED BY OBJECTIVE EVIDENCES FOR CHRISTIAN TRUTH.** "To [his apostles] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days." Acts 1:3

**ASSURANCE CANNOT NEGLECT THE PAINFUL WORK OF SELF-EXAMINATION.** "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you - unless indeed you fail the test?" 2 Corinthians 13:5

**ASSURANCE WILL DIMINISH IN THE PRESENCE OF CONCEALED SIN.** "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long." Psalm 32:3

**ASSURANCE COMES FROM HEARING THE WORD OF CHRIST.** "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Romans 10:17

"These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." John 20:31

**REPEATED FOCUSING ON THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST IS CRUCIAL FOR ASSURANCE.** "Since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith." Hebrews 10:21-22

**WE MUST PRAY FOR EYES TO SEE THE TRUTHS THAT SUSTAIN ASSURANCE.** "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." Ephesians 1:18-19

**ASSURANCE IS NOT EASILY MAINTAINED IN PERSONAL ISOLATION.** "And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you.'" 1 Corinthians 12:21

**ASSURANCE IS NOT DESTROYED BY GOD'S DISPLEASURE AND DISCIPLINE.** "Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me out to the light, and I will see His righteousness." Micah 7:8-9

**WE MUST OFTEN WAIT PATIENTLY FOR THE RETURN OF ASSURANCE.** "I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many will see and fear and will trust in the LORD." Psalm 40:1-3

**ASSURANCE IS A FIGHT TO THE DAY WE DIE.** "Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life." 1 Timothy 6:12

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." 2 Timothy 4:7

**ASSURANCE IS FINALLY A GIFT OF THE SPIRIT.** "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God." Romans 8:16

"The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself... And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." 1 John 5:10-11

Longing for your assurance, Pastor John

# The Agonizing Problem of the Assurance of Salvation

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By John Piper April 28, 1998

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The most agonizing problem about the assurance of salvation is not the problem of whether the objective facts of Christianity are true (God exists, Christ is God, Christ died for sinners, Christ rose from the dead, Christ saves forever all who believe, etc.). Those facts are the utterly crucial bedrock of our faith. But the really agonizing problem of assurance is whether I personally am saved by those facts.

This boils down to whether I have saving faith. What makes this agonizing - for many in the history of the church and today - is that there are people who think they have saving faith but don't. For example, in Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

So the agonizing question for some is: do I really have saving faith? Is my faith real? Am I self-deceived? Some well-intentioned people try to lessen the problem by making faith a mere decision to affirm certain truths, like the truth: Jesus is God, and he died for my sins. Some also try to assist assurance by denying that any kind of life-change is really necessary to demonstrate the reality of faith. So they find a way to make James 2:17 mean something other than what it seems to mean: "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead." But these strategies to help assurance backfire. They deny some Scripture; and even the minimal faith they preserve can be agonized over and doubted by the tormented soul. They don't solve the problem, and they lose truth. And, perhaps worst of all, they sometimes give assurance to people who should not have it.

Instead of minimizing the miraculous, deep, transforming nature of faith, and instead of denying that there are necessary life-changes that show the reality of faith, we should tackle the problem of assurance another way. We should begin by realizing that there is an objective warrant for resting in God's forgiveness of my sins, and there is a subjective warrant for God's forgiveness of my sins. The objective warrant is the finished work of Christ on the cross that "has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). The subjective warrant is our faith which is expressed in "being sanctified."

Next we should realize that saving faith has two parts. First, faith is a spiritual sight of glory (or beauty) in the Christ of the gospel. In other words, when you hear or read what God has done for sinners in the cross and the resurrection of Jesus, this appears to your heart as a great and glorious thing in and of itself even before you are sure you are saved by it. I get this idea from 2 Corinthians 4:4, where Paul says that what Satan hinders in the minds of unbelievers is the "seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." For faith to be real there must be a supernatural "light" that God shines into the heart to show us that Christ is glorious and wonderful (2 Corinthians 4:6). This happens as a work of the Spirit of God through the preaching of the gospel.

Second, faith is a warranted resting in this glorious gospel for our own salvation. I say "warranted resting" because there is an "unwarranted resting" - people who think they are saved who are not, because they have never come to see the glory of Christ as compellingly glorious. These people only believe on the basis of wanting rescue from harm, not because they see Christ as more beautiful and desirable than all else. But for those who "see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" their resting is warranted.

What this means practically is that we should continually look to the cross and the work of God in Christ, because this is where God makes the light of the gospel shine. Secondly, we should continually pray for God to "enlighten the eyes of our hearts" (Ephesians 1:18). Thirdly, we should love each other; because, as John said, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." In the end, assurance is a precious gift of God. Let us pray for each other that it will abound among us.

Seeing and resting, Pastor John

## Eternal Security, Assurance of Salvation, and Perseverance of the Saints Passages:

1. II Timothy 1:12 “I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that **He is able** to keep that which I have entrusted unto Him until That Day.”  
2:11-13 “Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; {12} if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; {13} if **we are faithless, he will remain faithful**, for he cannot disown himself.”
2. Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the **gift of God** is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”  
8:29-30 “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the likeness of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. {30} And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”  
8:35-39 “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, {39} neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to **separate us** from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (vv. 38-39)  
10:9-10 “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, **you will be saved**. {10} For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”
3. John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”  
10:28 “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; **no one can snatch them out of my hand**.”
4. Revelation 22:17 “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the **free gift** of the water of life.”
5. I Thessalonians 5:23-24 “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. {24} The one who calls you is faithful **and he will do it**.”
6. I Corinthians 3:15 “If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one **escaping through the flames**.”
7. Ephesians 4:30 “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were **sealed** for the day of redemption.”
8. Philippians 1:6 “Being confident of this, that **he** who began a good work in you will **carry it on to completion** until the day of Christ Jesus.”
9. I John 1:8-9 “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

A healthy Christian does ask themselves occasionally, if they are really a believer (II Pet. 1:10). When we see sin in our lives it should push us to ask this question. Romans 7 is often where we turn to grapple with an understanding of our sins, but Romans 8, the life in the Spirit, is where we are to live!

Matthew 7:21-23 may be one of the most difficult passages of Scripture for Christians to contemplate. There, people asked Jesus, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?" (Evidently, they were Pentecostals, like me.) Instead of commending them, however, Jesus said, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers." These people were self-deceived about the authenticity of their Christianity.

In *Am I Really a Christian?* Mike McKinley outlines five things all Christians have:

1. Belief in and love of true doctrine.
2. Hatred for sin in your life.
3. Freedom from love of the world.
4. Love for other people.
5. Perseverance over time.

Crucially, McKinley grounds his teaching in *grace*, not works. "Our goal in this book," he writes, "is not to ask whether we have done enough to earn God's love and favor. Instead, our goal is to begin learning how to look for the evidence that God has done his mighty work in our lives." This goal admirably encapsulates balanced biblical teaching about justification by grace through faith that leads to sanctified works.

Given that 76 percent of Americans self-identify as Christian, it is important for American believers to understand what being a Christian really means.