

Assurance of Salvation

I John 3:19-24

Introduction

One of the themes of John's letter – is that of 'Assurance of Salvation'

Assurance has to do with – 'Can a person know that they are saved / in a right relationship with God / and they are on their way to heaven?'

Many people of faith – experience periods of doubt – where they wonder – 'Am I truly saved?'
Am I among the born-again?

How do I know for certain?

When you are on your death bed – having assurance of salvation is a priceless treasure – and brings peace of mind when one is confronted with their own mortality

When you are on eternity's doorstep - - - you don't want to be thinking - - - 'boy I hope I go to heaven' - - - I hope Jesus claims He knows me!

I remember one occasion – [as a child] – a SS teacher led some of us children in praying a prayer [asking Jesus to be our Savior] – and then she filled out a little form that said the date we prayed that prayer – I even taped it in my Bible

November 5, 1978 – I was 10 years old

You can probably guess what we were told

If Satan ever gets you to doubt your salvation – you can point to that date and say – 'look – right there it says that I accepted the Lord Jesus as my Savior.'

The problem: there are a lot of people who have prayed a prayer like that – and who go on to live lives of wickedness – showing no evidence of possessing saving faith or of being born-again

Is a piece of paper with a date on it – a valid or 'good' basis of assurance?

John is trying to help his readers find assurance of their salvation

He is writing so that they may know . . .

I John 5:13 - 'These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.'

He has given us several tests – or practical evidences of being born-again

The evidence of obedience – am I trying to follow God's Word

I John 2:3 - 'And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.'

The grace that *forgives* is also a grace that *transforms* the sinner – makes us new creatures in Christ – [II Cor. 5:17]

C.S. Lewis put this in rather common-sense terms

C.S. Lewis: 'There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus, if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him.' [MC p. 114]

It makes no sense to say – I trust in Jesus - - - I just don't care to do anything He said

That would make nonsense of the idea of 'trust'

We saw another test in Ch. 3

I John 3:10 - 'By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.'

Righteousness becomes evidence of genuine saving faith

Not sinless perfection – but - - - the direction of one's life has changed - - there is evidence of genuine repentance / turning from sin - - - seeking to follow Christ

Somebody once put the question this way: 'If you were accused of being a Christian - - - would there be enough evidence to convict you?'

For me – I prayed a prayer when I was 10 - - - but then the pattern of my life afterwards - - - went pretty far south in my teen years [drinking // swearing / etc.]

I was living recklessly - - - and I had no assurance of salvation

There was no inward peace from the Holy Spirit saying – 'You have been saved - - - you are a child of God'

I didn't get the sense that having a piece of paper memorializing one prayer was going to convince God of the genuineness of my faith

God got my attention – thru a series of events – the last – wrecking my car while drunk driving

I started reading the Bible – and read things like

James 1:22 - 'Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.'

I read Matthew 7 – where Jesus said – ‘Many will say unto me – “Lord, Lord - - -‘

Thru Scripture – I came to see that my doubts were well-founded – that I had good reason to doubt the reality of my so-called faith

My belief in Jesus moved from an empty profession - - - to a genuine trust by the working of God’s Spirit in my heart

If you are concerned about the issue of assurance of salvation

The Apostle John will guide our thinking on this issue this morning – as He reminds us of the basis of assurance – how we can know that we have eternal life

I. Assured Hearts - vv. 19-22

John has introduced this topic of assurance – and having a knowledge of our state – and where we stand before God

He introduced the visible display of love for one another - - - as an evidence of having been born-again.

I John 3:14 - 'We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.'

We gain knowledge about our state – by looking at our lives - - - love of the brethren is a helpful evidence of who we are and have become in Christ

John sounds a bit like the old adage: ‘If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck . . .’

I John 3:19 - 'We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him.'

This thread of assurance is woven throughout John’s entire letter

Don Whitney: 'Assurance of salvation is a God given awareness that He has accepted the death of Christ on your behalf and forgiven you of your sins. It involves confidence that God loves you, that He has chosen you, and that you will go to heaven. Assurance includes a sense of freedom from the guilt of sin, relief from the fear of judgment, and joy in your relationship with God as your Father.'

Assurance is a wonderful blessing to the Christian at the time of death – but *also* in day to day living

Assurance of salvation gives us joy in our salvation now - - - it frees us to go on in our faith - - - to serve and to grow – and to worship Christ our Savior as one of the Redeemed

We sing the song, ‘Blessed Assurance’

*Blessed Assurance – Jesus is mine
Oh what a foretaste of glory divine*

Thomas Brooks: ‘The being in a state of grace [salvation] will yield a man heaven hereafter, but the seeing of himself in this state will yield him both a heaven here and a heaven hereafter.’

My desire for you is that you have a genuine assurance of salvation – that is well-founded upon biblical truth

I once sat under a pastor – whose message seemed to be ‘nobody is saved unless you are worried you might not be!’

I had a problem with that - - - because that acted like assurance is not something we really need to live for the Lord

If you know that your salvation is real – your sins are forgiven - you can endure trials / testings of your faith better - - - you are better equipped to face down temptation - - - you have cause to rejoice in the promises of God

I received a phone call this week – from a guy out by Iowa City - - - he had found our church on the Master’s seminary web page -- - he’s a John MacArthur listener – so he called me out of the blue and said he was struggling with assurance of salvation

I said – well – I am working on that topic right now for a sermon!

We talked over where does assurance come from

‘If you were to die tonight – and God says: ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’

The correct answer is: Nothing but the blood of Jesus

Knowing the correct answer and truly believing it - - - can be two different things – ‘How do we know we have believed?’ – that our faith is genuine

John Bunyan - - the guy who wrote – Pilgrim’s Progress - - - struggled to attain assurance of salvation for several years in his faith

One day – he was reading John’s gospel – he came across

John 6:37 - 'All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.'

John Bunyan: 'This Scripture also did now most sweetly visit my soul, "and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out" [Jn. 6:37] O the comfort that I have had from this word, "in no wise!" as who should say, by no means, for nothing, whatever he hath done. But Satan would greatly labor to pull this promise from me, telling me that Christ did not mean me, and such as I, but sinners of a lower rank, that had not done as I had done. But I would answer him again, Satan, there is in this word no such exception, but him that comes, him, any him, him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.'

He found assurance by meditating in the Scriptures

I love that phrase: 'this Scripture did now most sweetly visit my soul'

If your assurance is doubtful - - - spend time in God’s Word

Assurance comes when we know what God’s Word says - - and we choose to rest on His promises

God says – if I have trusted in Christ alone for my salvation – if I have cast myself upon Him – believed that He died for me and rose from the dead – then I am saved

Romans 10:9,10 - 'That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes resulting in righteousness and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation.'

So I ask: Have I embraced the gospel message thru faith? [I Jn. 3:23]

If our hearts condemn us at times - - - we rest in the greatness of God and his knowledge of us – our hearts

In Jesus’ discussion with Peter at the end of John’s gospel

Peter had blown it completely – at the arrest of Jesus - - he denied knowing Jesus 3 X

Jesus asked Peter 3X, 'Do you love me?'

Peter finally gave up and said, 'Lord you know all things'

i.e. – you know who I am – nothing is hidden from you

If your trust is in Jesus
He knows it – we can be sure of that!

If our heart condemns us - - - the troubled conscience can be reassured by the all-knowing
God

This is offered up as a comfort - - -

God knows those who are His / He knows if your faith is sincere or not

But – John [and Paul] remind us - - - that we can see evidences of our faith – and should look
for such

II Corinthians 13:5 - '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?'

John Stott: 'If we would assure our hearts when they accuse and condemn us,
we must look for evidence of the Spirit's working, and particularly whether He
is enabling us to believe in Christ, to obey God's commandments and to love the
brethren.'

Love in our life – shows the evident working of God's Spirit in our lives – it is evidence

John MacArthur: 'Only those who have been genuinely converted through the
supernatural work of God possess the sacrificial love that John describes in vv.
14-18.'

The natural state of man – as a sinner – is to be selfish / to live in the realm of hate / under
the sway of Satan

*** Having love for the brethren bolsters assurance that we belong to God

Joel Beeke: 'Love for our Savior and His people tell us that our Christianity is
not counterfeit.'

II. The Prayer Privilege - v. 22

As Christians - - - we have a great privilege of prayer - - - and will be people who pray

Assurance is bolstered by prayer

I know whom I have believed - - - how? - I pray to Him everyday

Tozer: 'Ransomed men need no longer pause in fear to enter the Holy of Holies. God wills that we should push on into His presence and live our whole life there. This is to be known to us in conscious experience. It is more than doctrine to be held; it is a life to be enjoyed every moment of every day.'

I Thessalonians 5:17 - 'Pray without ceasing.'

We see the all these aspects of the Christian life being linked together - - love, assurance, confidence in prayer / etc.

One of the first words young children learn – mommy, daddy
That should be our first instinct as well as believers

Romans 8:15-16 - '... you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.'

We want this testimony of the Holy Spirit – who tells us God is our Father

As we pray and interact with God - - - we see His movements in our lives / we discern His will / are better led by Him thru prayer

We don't always get what we ask in prayer
Sometimes what we ask might not be God's will

John will give further instruction on prayer later

I John 5:14 - 'And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.'

Timothy Keller: "God will either give us what we ask or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything He knows."

As a Christian develops their prayer life - - - they bolster their assurance - - because they don't just believe that God hears their prayers - - - they know it

A young boy once made for himself a toy boat and went to sail it on a nearby lake. After a little while – his boat got away from him and sailed out to deeper waters where he couldn't reach it. He noticed an older boy nearby and asked him if he could help him get his boat back. The older boy said nothing – picked up a few stones and seemed to be throwing them at the boat. The little boy thought that his boat was gone for good and was quite irritated with the older boy for throwing stones at it. But then he noticed that instead of hitting his boat – each stone went beyond it and made a little wave which moved the boat nearer to

shore. The older boy knew what he was doing after all and eventually the boat was close enough to reach.

I think we sometimes feel like that little boy at times when we pray to God

We ask Him for help – or for Him to meet a need – [he throws out a stone]

For a while nothing seems to happen – perhaps things even occur that seem to go in the opposite direction – God is not making sense to us

But God is steadily carrying out His own will in the process – we come to see that over time in our faith

In prayer we recognize that just as we call our children to trust us at times – even though they might not understand all that we know and see - - - in the same way God calls us to trust Him with His answers - - because He has more information than we have – and He is Lord

He has all knowledge - - we are limited and finite

Prayer and obeying God's Word are pleasing to Him

Proverbs 15:8 - 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.'

We find that disobedience is always harmful to our prayer lives

MLJ: 'If I go to God with a double mind, holding on to my sin and knowing that I am living a wrong life, I will have no confidence in my prayer.'

True prayer is backed and bolstered by an obedient life

Ps. 66:18 - 'If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.'

III. The Indwelling Spirit - vv. 23-24

Here we see two essential aspects of the Christian life:

Believe in Christ and love one other

The Holy Spirit gives assurance of salvation

Our lives will be different because of the work of the Spirit in our lives

Philippians 2:12-13 - 'So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation

with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.'

He is producing in me obedience – hatred of sin - - - love of righteousness - - - love for the brethren / - - - desire to obey the commands of Christ

It is not always easy to love / it is not always easy to obey / it is not always easy to pray

We see evidence of God's grace in our lives - - - breaking thru - - - and manifesting itself – when we are people who walk in love / obey His Word - - - trust in Jesus

Such things point to the genuineness of faith

Conclusion

These indications of authentic saving faith are there to bolster assurance / validate it / prevent us from being deceived about our salvation

But – with that said - - - we never turn to the evidences to save [they are evidences of salvation – not the grounds of salvation] - - - we look only to Christ for our salvation

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus

John Piper: 'My confidence on the last day will not rest on my transformation. I have too far to go to put any confidence in what I have accomplished. Instead, I rest on Jesus Christ. He is my righteousness. He is the guarantor of my salvation. I am justified by faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone.'

To be saved and to know you are saved - that is blessed assurance