

Lesson 14: Are you sure?

Intro

Believing in Jesus Christ means you have a living, personal relationship with Him. Jesus truly desires to have a deep, trusting relationship with us. One in which He can give us the assurance and the security that we need. He wants us to trust Him fully with our lives and in his promises. In the context of a trusting relationship with Him we can have the assurance that we are saved through Him. This assurance alone gives us peace, security, joy, and strength in our faith. Only those who know that they are accepted by Jesus Christ can look forward with joy to His second coming. Whereas doubts and insecurity lead to fear and will only cause us to dread His return. The biblical assurance of salvation is an indispensable part of the Advent message because we are to warn people to be prepared for the second coming of Christ and to look forward with joy to this day. Only those who know they are saved by faith in Jesus Christ can pray, "Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20)

Many Christians do not have assurance of salvation

Unfortunately, in regards to their salvation, many Christians do not have this assurance. Although they try their hardest to please God, they are not sure if they are accepted. There are many causes for this insecurity. For example:

- They have not fully given their life over to Christ.
- They have not understood the message of justification by faith and try to earn God's favor through their own strength and works.
- They are afraid of having a false self-assurance of salvation without truly being saved.
- They have a known sin that they cling to in their life.
- They base their faith on changing emotions.
- They are discouraged by their weaknesses and their mistakes and believe that God cannot accept them as they are.

And you?

What about you? Do you have the assurance that you are accepted by God and have been saved? If you were to die today or if Jesus were to come again today, would you have the assurance that you would be saved? Is your answer clearly "Yes"? If yes, then on what basis do you claim your assurance? Is your answer "Maybe" or "No"? If that is the case, can you explain why you do not have an assurance of salvation?

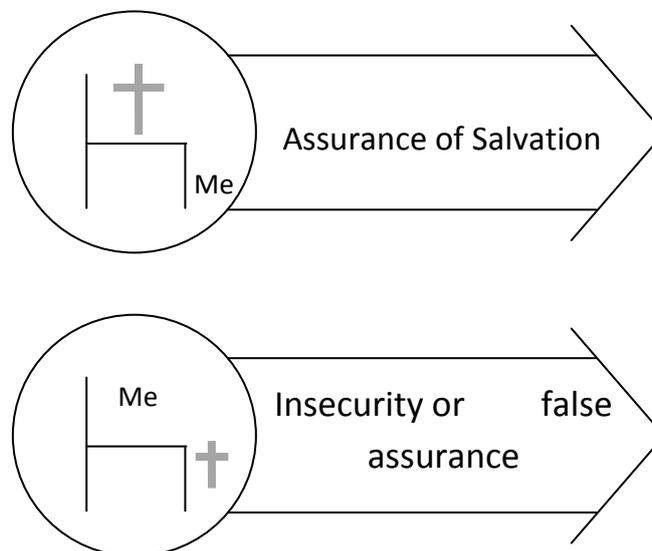
It is possible! The Bible is very clear! It is possible to know that we have experienced salvation through Jesus Christ. It isn't a hope or an idea. Those who have given their life to Jesus Christ can know that they have eternal life.



What did John write about the assurance of salvation? Under what condition can we have it?

1 John 5:11-13

John writes: "He who has the Son has life: he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." John also adds: "These things I have written 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 continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." Our assurance of eternal life is based upon our clear decision to follow Jesus Christ. When I surrender control to Him, He fulfills His promise in me and gives me the assurance of salvation. Without complete surrender there is only insecurity and false assurance. The assurance of salvation is not dependent upon whether we are good enough. It is rooted in a genuine, heartfelt approach to Jesus, placing complete trust in Him, and relinquishing every right to live our lives the way we want to live the way that He wants. The foundation of our salvation is justification by faith in the grace of God and not because of how much progress we have made towards perfection.



An attractive, joyous, fruit bearing Christian life is impossible without the assurance of salvation. The agonizing thoughts of doubt that God has accepted us, robs us of joy and keeps us from sharing our faith. Just like a marriage can only blossom when both partners feel they have been accepted by one another, our faith can only grow when we know that we have been accepted by God. The assurance of salvation is not a "once saved always saved" kind of guarantee because it is possible to turn our back on God and thus lose our salvation. Salvation is not just a decision for tomorrow and eternity, but for here and now.



How do the following texts describe the assurance that believers may have in their faith?

John 6:47: _____

Romans 5:1: _____

Romans 8:1,14: _____

1 Corinthians 2:12: _____

1 John 2:12: _____

1 John 3:1: _____

1 John 3:14: _____

1 John 4:17,18: _____

1 John 5:14,15: _____

Quote #1

“It is our privilege to go to Jesus and be cleansed, and to stand before the law without shame or remorse. ‘There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.’ Romans 8:1”
(Steps to Christ, p. 51)

False assurance of salvation

Satan does not want us to have true, biblical assurance of salvation because we can gain strength for our faith from it. So he attempts to do two things. He causes us to doubt God’s promises or gets us to believe in a false type of assurance in which we assume that we are saved when in reality we are not.



How do the following texts describe a false assurance of salvation?

Matthew 7:21-23: _____

Luke 18:9-14: _____

1 John 2:4: _____

Jeremiah 6:13,14,16: _____

Reasons for a false assurance of salvation

The Bible gives two reasons for a false assurance of salvation. Firstly, the Bible describes people who rely on their own works and on their own righteousness. People who think that they are good enough for heaven. In other words their faith is founded upon their own righteousness. Paul describes very clearly the consequences of self-righteousness: “for as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse...” (Galatians 3:10) “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4). Write the consequences of trying to justify yourself by keeping the law in the space below!

Secondly, the Bible describes people who are quite sure that they are saved but consciously and willfully break God’s commandments. Conscious, willing disobedience is nothing other than breaking trust with God. It eats away our relationship with Jesus, which is the foundation of our salvation and is nothing more than a spiritual short-circuit. Of course, neither one of these will give us assurance of salvation.

Assurance and Feelings

Many people are plagued with doubts about their salvation because they do not *feel* saved. Their feelings are the measuring stick to determine if they have been saved. We must remember that our feelings can be deceptive. Feelings have their place in the life of a Christian, but they should not be in first place.

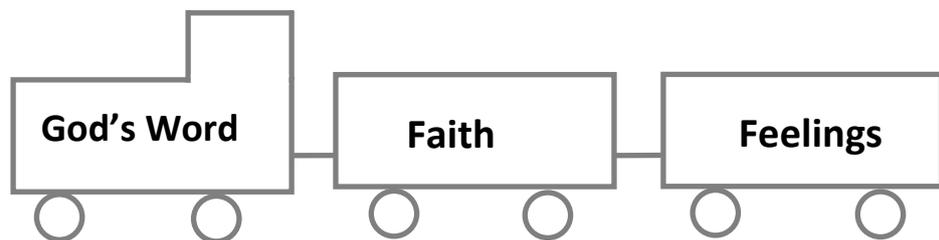


John, who speaks so much about the assurance of salvation, knew about the deceptive role that feelings can and do play. What advice does he give in regard to this? What is a sure sign for John that we are accepted by God?

1 John 3:19-24

The Faith train

John describes the role of God's word with His promises that target our faith and our feelings. When our heart (our feelings) condemns us after we have surrendered our lives to Jesus, we should ignore it. Our faith is based on God's word and not on our feelings. How we feel should not be the determining factor in how we view our salvation. The picture below should underscore this thought.



The train begins with God's word, which promises us eternal life. Of course, we could never earn this through our own strength. God invites us to trust His word and by faith accept eternal life. Our faith is driven by God's word and not by our feelings. Our feelings are not the measuring stick for our salvation. They follow our faith. If we make our feelings the head of the train, our spiritual lives will constantly be in roller coaster mode. Our assurance of salvation would be as unpredictable as the weather. The foundation for our assurance of salvation remains: grace and faith. They are not dependent on our feelings. God is faithful regardless of how we feel.

Quote #2

"You have confessed your sins, and in heart put them away. You have resolved to give yourself to God. Now go to Him, and ask that He will wash away your sins and give you a new heart. Then believe that He does this because He has promised." (*Steps to Christ*, p. 49,50)

Quote #3

"Do not wait to feel that you are made whole, but say, 'I believe it; it is so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised.'" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 51)

Quote #4

"With rich promises of the Bible before you, can you give place to doubt? Can you believe that when the poor sinner longs to return, longs to forsake his sins, the Lord sternly withholds him from coming to His feet in repentance? Away with such thoughts! Nothing can hurt your own soul more than to entertain such a conception

of our heavenly Father. He hates sin, but He loves the sinner, and He gave Himself in the person of Christ, that all who would might be saved and have eternal blessedness in the kingdom of glory. What stronger or more tender language could have been employed than He has chosen in which to express His love toward us? He declares, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.' Isaiah 49:15" (*Steps to Christ, p. 54*)

Quote #5 "You confess your sins and give yourself to God. You will to serve Him. Just as surely as you do this, God will fulfill His word to you. If you believe the promise,--believe that you are forgiven and cleansed,--God supplies the fact; you are made whole, just as Christ gave the paralytic power to walk when the man believed that he was healed. It is so if you believe it." (*Steps to Christ, p. 51.*)

Assurance and Weakness What about when I feel weak and am sad and discouraged about my weakness? Is my weakness a clear sign that I am not saved? This may seem to be humble thinking but it is nothing more than a form of righteousness by works. Whomever says: "Although I have accepted Jesus in my life, I cannot have an assurance of salvation by faith because I am not good enough" is really saying, "God accepts me only when I am first good enough." The truth is that we can never be good enough, that is why God graciously offers us salvation through faith. John writes very clearly about the assurance of salvation not to Christians who have overcome every sin and every failure (compare 1 John 1:8, 10), but "So that we might know"). Besides, the closer I come to Jesus, the more clearly I see my own faults and weaknesses. This is proof that God's Spirit is working in me, because without Him we can not see our faults and will never show true remorse for them.



Jesus always had words of encouragement for people, especially those who were fully aware of their weaknesses. Read the following texts and ask yourself, "How can we come to Jesus? What is God's will? What is Jesus' reaction when we come to Him?"

John 6:37-40: _____

Matthew 11:28-30: _____

My salvation is not based on my good works or my character strengths. When I give my life completely and honestly over to Jesus, then I may know that He has accepted me. God is faithful to His promises! He does not leave me alone in my weakness! Read the wonderful quotes below from Ellen White that brings this message home!

Quote #6 "There are those who have known the pardoning love of Christ and who really desire to be children of God, yet they realize that their character is imperfect, their life faulty, and they are ready to doubt whether their hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. To such I would say, do not draw back in despair. We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are

not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God. No; Christ is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Said the beloved John, 'These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' 1 John 2:1" (*Steps to Christ, p, 64*)

Quote #7

"When the mind dwells upon self, it is turned away from Christ, the source of strength and life. Hence it is Satan's constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Saviour and thus prevent the union and communion of the soul with Christ. The pleasures of the world, life's cares and perplexities and sorrows, the faults of others, or your own faults and imperfections—to any or all of these he will seek to divert the mind. Do not be misled by his devices. Many who are really conscientious, and who desire to live for God, he too often leads to dwell upon their own faults and weaknesses, and thus by separating them from Christ he hope to gain the victory. We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him. Put away all doubt; dismiss your fears." (*Steps to Christ, p. 71,72*)

Quote #8

"Some seem to feel that they must be on probation, and must prove to the Lord that they are reformed, before they can claim His blessing. But they may claim the blessing of God even now. They must have His grace, the Spirit of Christ, to help their infirmities, or they cannot resist evil. Jesus loves to have us come to Him just as we are, sinful, helpless, dependent. We may come with all our weakness, our folly, our sinfulness, and fall at His feet in penitence. It is His glory to encircle us in the arms of His love and to bind up our wounds, to cleanse us from all impurity." (*Steps to Christ, p. 52*)

We have an Advocate!

About 2000 years ago, Jesus returned to Heaven to intercede for us. His heavenly ministry is the guarantee for our salvation. What Jesus completed on the cross for all mankind was for all time, and He applies it for us personally in the Heavenly Sanctuary. From there He answers our prayers, forgives us our sins, sends out help, and all other necessary functions so that we can grow in our sanctification. The source of our confidence is found in Jesus as our Advocate in the Heavenly Sanctuary!



How do Paul and John describe this confidence?

Hebrews 4:14-16: _____

Ephesians 3:11,12: _____

1 John 2:1: _____

God is our Confidence

We may know that we are God's children and that he gives us confidence through faith! The Bible is full of this truth. David rejoiced in this confidence: "In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us" (Psalm 62:7,8). Paul encouraged the believers with these words: "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

This confidence will never lead us to carelessly relax as if we had no more room for growth. Rightly understood, it leads us to quite the opposite, not to trust ourselves but to fully rely on Christ and to follow Him "till we all come ... to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13). He did not accept us because we were perfect, but so that he can restore His image in our hearts and thus make us more and more like him. This confidence will also not lead us to treat sin as a trifling matter or to justify it. The security and assurance in Christ that we are accepted by Him helps us that much more to hate sin. This security and assurance will give us the strength to overcome bad habits and character weaknesses and make us more like Jesus.

Ellen White often wrote letters to people who loved Jesus but were struggling with doubts and lacked faith that Jesus had truly accepted them. So in 1887 she wrote a letter to a sister in Christ, who suffered under this weakness and was plagued by doubts regarding her salvation. Ellen White wrote her words of hope, encouragement, and confidence. We need those words just as much today as the sister struggling back then. Please read carefully the letter she wrote!

A Letter from Ellen White

My dear sister,

I have evidence that God loves you, and that precious Saviour who gave Himself for you that you might be saved will not thrust you from Him because you are tempted, and in your weakness may have been overcome...

Now do not worry yourself out of the arms of the dear Jesus, but lie trustingly in faith. He loves you, He cares for you, He is blessing you, and He will give you His peace and grace. He is saying to you, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee' (Luke 5:23)...I tell you Jesus loves us although we err and are betrayed into sin. He will forgive us, He will pardon and that abundantly. Gather to your soul the sweet promises of God...

Look away from your wretchedness to the perfection of Christ. We cannot manufacture a righteousness for ourselves. Christ has in His hands the pure robes of righteousness and He will put it upon us. He will speak sweet words of forgiveness and promises. And He presents to the thirsty soul fountains of living waters, whereby we may be refreshed. He bids us to come unto Him with all our burdens, all our griefs, and He says we shall find rest. We must therefore believe that He speaks pardon, and we must show our faith by resting in His love...

This feeling of guiltiness must be laid at the foot of the cross of Calvary. The sense of sinfulness has poisoned the springs of life and true happiness. Now Jesus says, 'Lay it all on Me; I will take your sin, I will give you peace. Destroy no longer your self-respect, for I have bought you with the price of My own blood. You are Mine, your weakened will I will strengthen; your remorse for sin, I will remove.' Then turn your grateful heart, trembling with uncertainty, and lay hold upon the hope set before you. God accepts your broken contrite heart. He offers you free pardon. He offers to adopt you into His family with His grace to help your weakness, and the dear Jesus

will lead you on step by step, if you will only put your hand in His and let Him guide you.

Search for the precious promises of God. If Satan thrusts threatenings before your mind, turn from them and cling to the promises." (*Letter 38, February 24, 1887, to "My dear Sister."*)

