

The Assurance of Salvation

Are you sure beyond a shadow of doubt that when Jesus comes back you will be saved? The Bible teaches that we are to have a firm hope of salvation when Jesus comes back. At the same time, it warns against assuming that we will be saved. Having a hope of salvation is not the same as assuming that we will be saved. Consider what can happen when people assume that they will be saved:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

Assuming that we will be saved is a dangerous thing to do. It does not come from faith. Let me suggest that we should adopt the thinking and attitude of the Apostle Paul when it comes to this subject.

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind” (Philippians 3:7-15a).

From the testimony of the Apostle Paul’s other writings, it is clear that he believed very strongly that when Jesus comes back, he would be saved. **But** it is important to note from the passage above that though he had very strong hope of salvation, he did not **assume** that he would be saved when Jesus comes back. He said that it was absolutely crucial to him that he live in such a way that results in knowing Jesus, the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. He thought it absolutely important to experience the sufferings of Jesus so that he would be conformed to His death....so that....**IF**, by any means, he might attain to the resurrection from the dead.

If any Christian might assume that he would be saved when Jesus comes back it would be Paul. Yet, he made no such assumption! On the contrary, he said he would actively press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Paul’s words almost sound frantic. If you can’t see Paul’s sense of urgency about this then I think you are not seriously contemplating his words in the passage above. Do you share Paul’s sense of urgency about your own salvation? If not, I suggest that your understanding of the gospel is not the same as Paul’s.

If these things have gotten your attention, then let me attempt to convey a biblical perspective about assurance of salvation.

God wants us to have hope of salvation based upon reality evidenced in His Word and also by our lives.

“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the

hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10).

In the beginning of this passage, Paul speaks about the reality of the coming judgment when God’s wrath will be poured out. He then tells them to remain alert so that they don’t get caught by surprise and come to sudden destruction when God’s wrath is poured out. But he then speaks about a figurative helmet (spiritual protection) which is the hope of salvation (when Jesus comes back).

It is extremely important that we have strong hope that we will be saved from the wrath of God that will be poured out when Jesus comes back. Without this hope, our faith has no anchor. If we believe that we are doomed to destruction, we will be despondent and unmotivated to continue walking by faith in this world. Hope of salvation is essential for our spiritual wellbeing. (For more on this, see my article [Reason to Have Strong Hope.](#))

What is hope of salvation?

The world has distorted the concept of hope. To most people, hope is merely wishful thinking. Someone might say, “I hope I win the lottery.” This person’s use of the word hope is not at all the way the Bible uses it. The way this person is thinking, he could more accurately say, “I wish I win the lottery.” At best, this is wishful thinking.

In contrast, the Bible uses the word hope to convey more of an expectation, but one based upon a solid promise from God that is believed by the individual. And this believing is not always comfortable. The one who hopes for salvation believes to the point that he is willing to suffer while waiting for it...because he really believes it will come.

“But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (Romans 8:25).

How do we obtain a biblical hope of salvation?

A trustworthy hope of salvation must be based upon reality evidenced in His Word and also by our lives. We must start with a correct understanding of God’s promises because they are the foundation on which all hope of salvation must rest. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the foundation for our hope. If our understanding of the gospel is skewed, then our hope may be based upon a false foundation. To believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, a person must be in agreement with God’s assessment of things. For example, that person must agree with God that because of his crimes against God, he deserves the full wrath of God in everlasting punishment. He must also agree with God that he cannot make himself worthy of salvation because God’s righteousness is absolute. He must recognize the fact that he is condemned and needs a savior who has the ability to rescue him. He must recognize that God, out of mercy, made a way of salvation by sending His Son to bear God’s wrath in his place. He must also recognize that when Jesus died on the cross, God accepted His death as payment in full for his sins. He must believe God’s promise that if he believes all these things from the heart, he will receive remission of sins and eternal life. Only if a man first believes all these things from the heart can he have any hope of salvation from the wrath of God coming upon the earth.

The two ingredients to a biblical hope of salvation.

1. *God has put away our sins*

The most important ingredient for a biblical hope is genuine belief of the gospel. The gospel demonstrates that God has punished our sins on Jesus. His promise is that anyone who believes this from the heart receives remission of sins. Because of this, there is now no condemnation to all who are “in Christ Jesus.” God has put away your sins if you truly believe the gospel from the heart. This event took place in history so you can bank on it. If Jesus had not done this, there would be no basis for anyone to have any hope of salvation. But because He did, anyone

who believes from the heart can be saved from the wrath of God that is coming on the earth. He does not reject anybody who comes!

2. *Evidence that we actually believe the gospel from the heart*

It is not enough that our sin is removed. We must have genuine faith that shows itself in obedience. Only those who believe will be saved. God justifies the one who has faith. Many people falsely think they have faith. They assume that since they were baptized, or since they “prayed a prayer to receive Jesus, or since they attend church, they have biblical faith. These things might be evidence that a person has faith. But a person can do all of these things and still not have genuine faith.

The Bible teaches that in order to have a biblical hope of salvation, our faith must be tested. If we continue believing in the face of trials, then we have reason to think that our faith is genuine. This is when hope springs up in us that is an anchor for our soul. It serves as a spiritual helmet.

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:1-4).

This short passage details the two necessary ingredients to a biblical hope of salvation. First, since we are now believing, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that He bore the punishment for all our sins and they are no longer on our account. Good news...great reason to hope because of what Jesus has already done and promised!

But then he goes on to talk about tribulations. He said that trials produce perseverance. Perseverance produces character. And character produces hope. Put another way, a person’s faith must bear up under trial. It is important to note that this means that our faith must bear up under all sorts of trials, including persecution and threat of death. Jesus said, *“Unless a man takes up his cross and follows me, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27)*. The greater the trial, the more our hope increases because it proves we really believe.

In the months immediately after a person first believes, trials come and because he believes, he continues to hold fast to Jesus as Lord and lives in obedience to Him. As a result, he observes that he is persevering and evidence accumulates that his faith is genuine. As a result, his hope of salvation increases. But whenever he stumbles, other evidence presents itself suggesting that his faith may not be genuine. All Christians sin so this is a common experience. It does not necessarily mean that the person’s faith is not genuine. But any time we sin, a question might arise in our hearts, “Is my faith genuine? After all, look at what I just did.” We don’t like the insecurity that such an experience produces. We really don’t want to hear on judgment day, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” But if a man truly believes, this experience alone and the fear it might produce drives him right back to the throne of grace. He pleads with God for grace to believe and to continue walking by faith in obedience to Jesus. He soon begins to notice again that his faith seems indeed to be genuine as it displays itself in attitudes and actions in every day life.

But as our faith continues to persevere under trial showing itself in obedience, our lives begin to take on more and more changes for the good. God is forming godly, Christ-like character in us. In other words, He is conforming us to the image of Jesus.

Peter describes this process in his second epistle.

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you

may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (II Peter 1:2-11).

Paul says in the Romans 5 passage that God uses trials of our faith to produce perseverance and that perseverance then leads to change in our character which produces stronger hope that we will indeed be saved from the wrath of God that is coming. In the passage above, Peter says that through the gospel, we become partakers of the divine nature. But he implies that if we are true believers, we will be motivated to live in such a way that godly character is produced in us and increases throughout our lives. Character traits such as, diligence, knowledge, virtue, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and divine love begin to show themselves in our lives and increase over time. The more we see the character (or life) of Jesus in us, the greater our hope because if Jesus lives in us, **we will be saved in the end**. Paul used the phrase, “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27b).

Since we will always battle against sin, we will occasionally lose these battles. But after a few years of living by obedient faith, we will have observed genuine faith at work in us the way we observed it when we first believed. And we will also observe our character becoming more Christ-like in general. Then when battles against sin are lost, our hope of salvation is not diminished as much as it might have been in the beginning when those battles were lost. The reason is that we can look back and see that indeed, God has truly been conforming us to the image of Jesus. I am being changed indeed! This is huge evidence that God has indeed caused me to be born again to a living hope and that there is strong reason to believe I will be saved from the wrath of God when Jesus returns.

There is no short cut to having this type of strong hope of salvation. If you are a new believer, your hope is mainly based upon the sure promise of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. This part of our hope is obviously the most secure because God never lies. But the increase of that hope can only occur as our faith is tested and the faith continues to evidence itself in good works and ultimately, Christ-like character.

If your walk of faith has been accompanied by many sinful failures, naturally, your hope of salvation will be less than someone who makes greater progress in the faith under trial. If you have not completely surrendered your life to Jesus or are holding back obedience in some area, you should not have much hope of salvation because this points to the possibility that you really do not believe. Or, if you are currently caught in some sin or addiction, this also is a contradiction to true faith. Your hope of salvation is damaged because there is evidence that you might not actually believe. **By saying these things, I am not saying that you are not a believer! You might very well be a believer. But the evidence of that believing is not showing itself strong at the present time.**

If your hope of salvation is weak due to these types of things in your life, what should you do? I believe that the little amount of hope you have should serve as motivation to draw near to God with greater zeal. There should be a growing desire for revival. Jesus said, “Seek and you shall find.” If you simply retreat into depression and despair, you will not do yourself any good. You must keep turning back to God and have the same attitude as the Apostle Paul that we read about in Philippians 3:7-15a which appears near the top of this article. I suggest you read this passage often and cling to the truth it contains.

If you examine your life and do not see much likeness to Jesus in it, then you should be bothered by it. You should not have much hope that you will be saved from the wrath of God coming upon the world. If you have been thinking that your salvation is secure because it is based upon isolated religious acts in your past, your basis for hope is ill-founded.

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall” (Matthew 7:24-27).

Only those who hear Jesus’ words AND DO THEM will be saved in the end. John said that at the marriage celebration of the Lamb, His wife (those who are in Christ) will be presented to Him. She will have made herself ready and be clothed in fine, clean, bright linen. This fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (RIGHTEOUS WORKS).

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” Revelation 19:7-8).

John probably recalled Jesus teaching about this along with Jesus’ warning:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding. ”’ But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ ” (Matthew 22:2-13).

Without righteous acts, we will not be properly clothed for the marriage celebration. So, let Jesus’ warning serve to drive us to Him in obedience with complete surrender to Him as Lord so that we don’t find ourselves cast out into outer darkness!

“When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

Recommended additional reading may be found at the following link written by Jonathan Edwards who lived about 300 years ago. The article is dense with thought so it is not light reading. But if you are concerned enough about your salvation to do some deep soul searching evaluation (to see if indeed you possess saving faith), take the time to study this article. You may get uncomfortable if you do read it.

<http://www.jonathan-edwards.org/ReligiousAffections.pdf>