

How You Can Have the Assurance of Salvation

By [J. Vernon McGee](#)

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and everyone that loveth him that begot loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not, but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. (1 John 5)

There is a gift that I would like to present to every Christian. It cannot be packed in excelsior, wrapped in brightly colored paper, tied with polychrome ribbon, or sealed with good wishes. It cannot be purchased with silver or gold. It is more valuable than all the treasures of this world. All the gold in all the nations of the world could not suffice as a down payment. It is not a material gift of this secular world but a real gift of the spiritual realm. It is intangible, but it is of inestimable and intrinsic value. Many who are rich would pay a handsome sum to possess it. Multitudes strive for it but find it just out of reach. As we face a future filled with fear and foreboding, it might appear as a will-o'-the-wisp. It is desperately and devoutly desired but seldom attained.

The world lists this gift as peace of mind, as a feeling of security that all is well for the future. Psychology defines it as a well-integrated personality freed from frustration. Scripture is more specific. The Bible sets forth this gift as a knowledge, a certainty, and an assurance concerning one's personal relationship to God. Simply stated, it is the assurance regarding one's salvation.

Can we know experientially that we are saved and that we are the children of God? For years, my soul was tossed on the troubled sea of uncertainty and insecurity. Finally, there dawned upon my darkened mind the light of Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform [perfect] it until the day of Jesus Christ.

It was then that the sun of Scripture rose with many shafts of light and penetrated the dark recesses of fears and doubts. I pray that I may be given wisdom and power to convey to your fearful heart the assurance of your salvation, if it is not already your present possession. For those who have experienced the assurance of salvation, perhaps these few words will stabilize and strengthen the fabric of your faith. Assurance is your rightful possession, and God wants you to have it as your portion.

First of all, we need to distinguish between one's eternal security and his assurance of salvation. The line of demarcation must be clearly drawn if we are to enter experientially into the joy of salvation.

Eternal security is an objective fact; assurance of salvation is a subjective experience.

Eternal security is not in the realm of experience, and therefore is totally independent of a person's feelings; assurance of salvation is truly an experience - an inner consciousness and confidence that a right relationship exists between the soul and God.

Eternal security rests upon certain objective facts that are established and sure; it depends upon God's faithfulness. A simple illustration will clarify this point. The Battle of Bunker Hill is a fact in American history. You and I did not experience the Battle of Bunker Hill, and our feelings are, therefore, no guide to the accuracy of history concerning it.

Eternal security rests upon what God says:

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. (1 John 5:12)
The most wonderful statement in the Bible (or out of the Bible, for that matter) is Romans 8:1 -

There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus....

In conjunction with this verse are verses 33 and 34 of the same chapter:

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Shall God that justifieth? Who is he that condemneth? Shall Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us?

The throne of God is behind every sinner who has trusted in Jesus. Christ's work of redemption is adequate enough to secure the perfect salvation for the sinner who trusts Him. If not, then the work of Christ was of no avail, and it was not a finished transaction but must be written down as "unfinished business." However, He, as it were, wrote over His cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

God is offering eternal life - everlasting life - to those who believe in Christ. It is not temporary or uncertain. It is not paid for on the installment plan. It is a gift the moment one believes, but for longer than a moment - for eternity.

You may or you may not have the assurance of this salvation that God offers as everlasting life. An anomalous situation exists today. Some Christians believe in the security of the believer but do not themselves have the assurance of their salvation; "My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:10), but they do exist.

God wants you to know that you are His child through faith in Jesus Christ:

But as many as received him, to them gave he power [the right] to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12, 13)

It is not honoring to Him for you to have misgivings, doubts, and a lack of assurance. "Maybe" and "perhaps" should not be in the vocabulary of a born-again Christian when the matter of salvation is the subject. It is not a "hope so" but a "know so" salvation that God offers. It is always described as everlasting or eternal life; it is not temporary or conditional. Listen to God and be assured:

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:12, 13)

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22)

This is not the language of uncertainty. There is a remarkable passage in this connection expressed in Isaiah 32:17 -

And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.

The righteousness mentioned here is not man's, but it is the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel. This is the righteousness of Christ, which is made over to us and gives us a standing before God. It cannot be improved upon because it is perfect, and it cannot be disturbed because it is given to the lost sinner who trusts in Jesus.

God wants all who trust the work in Christ to come to a place in experience where each can say with confidence, boldness, and much assurance, but with true humility:

...I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. (2 Timothy 1:12)

To fall short of this goal is to miss the best that He has for us. It reveals a defect in our understanding and in our appreciation of His "so great salvation" (Hebrews 2:3).

A very simple and homely illustration will show that God wants us to enjoy and be assured of our salvation. Traveling by air is something I do only in an emergency. Candidly, I have never enjoyed an airplane trip; I lack assurance and confidence in this method of travel. Pictures of train wrecks and statistics of highway fatalities do not increase my relish for air travel.

A trip from Los Angeles, California, to Phoenix, Arizona, only made matters worse. On the way over and on the way back, the trip to me was hazardous. It was a summer Saturday morning on the way over. The intense heat of the desert was threading its way into the cool fog of Southern California between the San Jacinto and San Geronimo mountains. The plane hit rough air and began to bounce around. Then the pilot found that the higher he went, the rougher it got; he leveled off and went through the pass at what appeared to be about 10,000 feet. At times, the plane would drop, and it seemed to me that it would never stop. I grabbed the seat in front of me and held on for dear life. Of course, the seat in front of me was dropping just as fast as the one in which I was sitting! A fellow traveler aboard, who had been around the world by air several times, stated that this was the roughest trip he had ever experienced. I concurred with him thoroughly, for it surely was my roughest trip - and, as I felt then, my last trip by air.

Across the aisle from me sat a man who was a former pilot. He was asleep by the time the plane took to the air. He was merely annoyed at all the disturbance and turned over and went back to sleep. He had flown many missions over Germany during World War II. When we landed and commented on the rough trip, he simply smiled and confessed that he had enjoyed it all. Frankly, I did not enjoy one minute of it.

Now, I was as safe as that man. Whatever security the plane offered was mine as well as his. We both had faith enough to enter the plane, but he had the faith, understanding, and experience to enjoy the trip. He had assurance, but I did not. What could have been a pleasant experience for me was a sad ordeal!

My friend, God wants you to enjoy your salvation. His "plane" cannot fall, and you do not have to hold on to the seat in front of you. He holds you!

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. (John 10:27-29)

He never lets go. Now sit back, relax, and enjoy your salvation. Someone has said, "All the way to heaven is heaven."

Why Do We Doubt?

There are many reasons why believers do not have the assurance of their salvation. Let us look at some of the principal ones.

Fear

Some are frightened souls who received the gospel in trembling and fear. The gospel was presented partially, and they were not told that they could have any assurance. There is always a serious doubt whether folk like this have ever been saved. The instability and inconsistency of the lives of many who live in the atmosphere of uncertainty do not reveal a thoroughgoing conversion. It is interesting to note what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians concerning the preaching of the gospel in their city:

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance, as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. (1 Thessalonians 1:5)

The gospel that produces changed lives comes in much assurance. Many who lack assurance are sincere, but they have actually never been born again.

While I was a pastor in Pasadena, California, an attractive young couple who had come to us out of a liberal church spoke to me one Wednesday evening after the service and exclaimed with great joy, "We have received the assurance of our salvation tonight!" The next Wednesday evening they came down smiling after the service and said, "Correction, please. We did not get the assurance of our salvation last week; we got saved."

They were thrilled as they related their experience in going home the week before and getting down on their knees and actually receiving Christ as Savior; this experience gave them assurance. This is the manner in which God intends the gospel to come to men and women - "in much assurance."

Emotionalism

Some depend upon an emotional experience, and they do not have the knowledge of their salvation. The gospel has not been given to them accurately, and they merely rest upon an emotional upheaval. If the experience was significant, then they fall back upon it to fortify their faith. When the emotional experience wears thin and there is not much to rest upon, then doubts and uncertainty creep in to make the heart disturbed. Many of these people do not know the assurance that there is in the gospel:

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.

(Colossians 2:2) Again, permit me to resort to a personal experience to clarify this point. One Easter Sunday, two couples came forward at the invitation. One couple was overcome with emotion; the other couple was stoical. The elders who dealt with them could not get a clear statement from the emotional couple because they were weeping so. The contrast was so great that some even doubted the genuineness of the couple who shed no tears. However, time proved that emotion was no indication of a real experience of conversion, for the emotional couple were pulled out of one ism shortly after that incident and then became involved in a second ism. The couple who seemed to have no emotional experience at all grew in grace and the knowledge of Christ. It became a joy to see them take their regular places in the services of the church. This couple had the "full assurance of understanding" from the very beginning.

Sin

Unconfessed sin in the life of a believer is the greatest single factor in robbing one of the assurances of salvation. God wants us to have the full assurance of faith; this comes experientially through fellowship with God. Sin breaks our fellowship, and this, in time, sets up a chain reaction that breaks our assurance.

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. (1 John 1:6) We can bluff our way through before others by putting up a front that all is well. But underneath, doubts begin to gnaw like little foxes at the fringe of our faith, and we actually feel that we are not really God's children. We dread the light because it makes us more conscious of our doubts. God is still our Father nonetheless, and a conviction of sin is pretty good evidence. We have lost our fellowship - not our salvation.

The Christian should come to the light, which is the Word of God. It reveals our sin, but it also shows us the remedy. The blood of Christ is still potent, and it is the basis of forgiveness for the sins of a child of God.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

The believer who walks in the light and discovers sin in his life knows that the blood of Christ keeps on cleansing him from sin; consequently, he goes in confession to Him:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Immediately, fellowship is restored for the sinning saint. The family fellowship is resumed and confidence and assurance are restored. You see, the child of God is always disturbed by sin in his life, as he knows it breaks fellowship with God. In fact, the line of demarcation is drawn at this point between God's children and the devil's offspring:

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth [practices] not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. (1 John 3:10)

Deliberate and continual sinning, without remorse or without repentance, is a clear indication that one has not come into the place of sonship. The child of God is distressed, disturbed, and distraught by the presence of sin. He hates the sin in his life and longs to be delivered from it. The presence of sin robs him of his assurance. The legitimate child of God can never compromise with the sin in his life.

How Can I Know?

Having listed the main things that rob a person of the assurance of salvation, let's look at some things that are evidence of salvation.

Desire to Obey

The child of God longs to obey God and to please Him:

And by this we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. (1 John 2:3) This desire to obey God gives him an assurance that he is a son of God.

He wants to know the will of God, and therefore he wants to know the Word of God. So he goes where he can hear the Word of God:

Oh, how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.... I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love.... I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil. (Psalm 119:97, 113, 162)

He finds that he not only has an appetite for the Word of God, but he also begins to understand it, and thereby growth takes place:

But he that is spiritual judgeth [understands] all things, yet he himself is judged [understood] of no man. (1 Corinthians 2:15)

There are other tests that indicate to a trembling but trusting heart that he or she is a child of God. God urges us to make the tests so that we may have assurance:

Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves. Know ye not yourselves how Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are discredited? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Reality in Prayer

A reality in prayer is evidence that we are children of God. There is a very remarkable statement in this connection made in the third chapter of 1 John:

And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. (v. 19)

As the child of God approaches the Father, a holy boldness confirms the heart. This is not presumption - it is the assurance that a child has in approaching a father. However, sin or some other impediment may make us hesitant and reluctant to approach the Father. God does not hear us because of our reluctance but because of Christ, and He hears us regardless of our condition:

For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. (v. 20)

Nevertheless, when our hearts are rightly related to Him, then there is a confidence given to us:

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. (v. 21)

Furthermore, when we are in His will, there are added tokens that we are His children:

And whatever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. (v. 22)

Answered prayer is an argument that one is a legitimate child of God. The prayer life of the believer is vital in assuring the soul of salvation.

Love for the Brethren

A love for the brethren and a passion for the souls of men are evidence that we are children of God. One of the most convicting and confirming facts sealing assurance to the heart is love of the brethren. Scripture is positive at this point:

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. (1 John 3:14)

Animosity and hatred in the heart will rob the child of God of assurance. Malice toward another Christian produces bitterness of soul and is therefore not a fertile soil to cultivate assurance. Malice is condensed anger. Lack of love for another believer robs more Christians of real enjoyment and satisfaction in the Christian life than perhaps any other single factor. It not only blights the soul of the Christian, but it also destroys any public testimony:

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:35)

To love other believers is not elective:

These things I command you, that ye love one another. (John 15:17)

Do not let a little root of bitterness rob you of assurance. Make things right with other believers. Not only will the believer love those within the Christian fellowship, but there will also be a desire for those outside the fold to come to a saving knowledge of Christ. It is impossible for Christ, the One who died for sinners, to be in the heart and there not be a longing

for the salvation of sinners. A sterile and frigid Christian is not likely to experience the sweetness and joy of full assurance, but a vital Christian, who knows something of the Savior's compassion, will find the joy of belonging and an abiding experience.

Conscious of Being His Child

A consciousness that we are children of God comes to the soul and says that we are the sons of God. This is the gracious work of the Spirit of God and not the product of psychological presumption.

By this know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. (1 John 4:13) This does not mean that we are conscious of the presence of the Holy Spirit, but it does mean that we are conscious of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not speak of Himself, but He speaks of Christ:

Nevertheless, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. (John 16:13)

Part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to make us conscious that we are the children of God.

The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. (Romans 8:16)

There is a counterfeit humility going the rounds today, and it sounds very pious, but it does not have the ring of the genuine. Some say that we are to grovel in the dust and act like worms - this is the modern way of putting on sackcloth and ashes. It is true that we are sinners; there is no good within us, no good comes out of us, and we have nothing in which to glory save the cross of Christ. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit does not bear witness with our spirit that we are the "worms" of God. No, He encourages us when we are in times of weakness and trembling, and in spite of all our failure says that we are the children of God.

A remarkable thing is stated in the following verse:

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. (Romans 8:15)

The word Abba is an untranslated Aramaic word. The translators of the first English Bibles, who had great reverence for the Word of God, who believed it was indeed the Word of God, would not translate it. Abba is a very personal word that could be translated "my Daddy." We don't use this word in reference to God because of the danger of becoming overly familiar with Him. But the Spirit affirms it and causes us to realize that God is our very own Father through regeneration and by adoption.

While I was praying one morning shortly before Christmas, my little seven-year-old daughter tiptoed into the room and placed a letter before me. Since I was getting nowhere in my prayer, I

paused to read the contents of the letter that she had scribbled in her childish hand (see opposite page).

Before Christmas, a father always comes into his proper position in the home and is treated with due respect. Nevertheless, the letter caused me to drop to my knees and be conscious anew and afresh that God was my Father. I cried out in joy, "You are my Father, and I love You. You have been gracious to me, and I know You always will." The veil was removed from my eyes, and my soul was flooded with a fresh consciousness that I was a son of God. This was the gracious work of the Spirit of God.

There is an experience of salvation for the child of God that he does not have to seek. It will come, for it is impossible for the Holy Spirit to regenerate a sinner and for Christ to dwell in the heart and there not be a corresponding experience.

Dr. George Truett told a story out of his long and fruitful ministry at First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas. One day he had the sad office of conducting the funeral of a young wife and mother from his congregation. After the service, friends gathered around the young husband and the little girl who were left. The friends urged the father to go with them to their homes for a few days. He refused with the statement that he would have to face the reality of life without his wife and, therefore, he would begin at once. He took the little girl back to the lonely house where everything in it reminded him of his wife. The little girl, sensing that something was wrong but not old enough to appreciate the situation, kept calling for her mother. The child did not make it any easier by constantly reminding the father that he was not feeding her or putting her to bed as her mother was accustomed to do. When the father had finally tucked the little one in bed and gone off to bed himself, thinking the little girl was asleep, he cried aloud in his anguish of soul, "Oh, God, it is dark down here."

The child, who was not asleep, began to cry and said, "Daddy, it is dark over here, too. Take me in bed with you." The father took the little one in bed with him and attempted to soothe her sobbing. Then she reached over in the darkness and felt the face of her father. "Daddy," she said, "I can go to sleep if your face is toward me." Being assured that his face was toward her, she soon dropped off into peaceful slumber.

The anxious father thought over this incident and the simple faith of the child in him. Then he cried out again, "Oh, God, it is dark down here, but I can bear it if I know Your face is toward me." Soon he, too, was sound asleep. The Holy Spirit, in a time of darkness and emergency, confirms to the sad spirit of the child of God that he is a son of God and that the heavenly Father does not have His face averted from His own.

When Did I Believe?

Perhaps these words have not been convincing to many anxious souls because they cannot establish, with any degree of certainty, a moment in time when they had a transforming experience with God. But there does not have to be a date for a "second birthday." Multitudes are kept in uncertainty because they hear others testify to a day, a moment, and a place when they

passed from death to life. If you have had such an experience, it certainly must be gratifying. But many others have not been that fortunate; yet they, too, are born-again believers.

If I may be permitted a final personal reference, this is my experience. I have never been able to put my finger on the moment that I was converted. As a boy, I went to an altar under a brush arbor, but no one thought to speak to me about my soul or to explain the way of salvation. The devil formerly used this to disturb my mind when I heard someone testify to a transforming experience. That master of doubt and deception would lean over my shoulder and whisper, "How do you know that you have accepted Christ?"

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer gave me the solution to this problem in a class lecture when I was in seminary, and the devil does not disturb me on this score anymore. Now I say to him, "Perhaps you are right. I may never have accepted Christ in the past. But you are witness that here and now I accept Him with all my heart. Now I am a child of God." If this has been your difficulty, then I beseech you to accept Christ this very moment - assure your heart and have the peace of God.

Do not look for an experience! Do not probe your feelings! Do not use psychoanalysis! Believe God! Take Him at His Word! Trust His faithfulness! "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). Christ says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). Will you come?

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. (1 John 5:12)

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