



Doctrine of Salvation

Assurance of Our Salvation

Explanation and Scriptural Basis

- One of the most common questions related to salvation is how one can know that they have, in fact, been saved.
- It is normal for Christians to have occasional doubts related to their salvation, but chronic doubt should strive to be resolved.
- Four categories of people:
 - Those who have “assurance”, but aren’t saved.
 - Biblical Example: The religious leaders in Jesus’s day. In spiritual blindness and pride, they rejected the healing of the great physician.
 - Modern Example: Those who “walked an aisle” 20 years ago, but don’t genuinely trust Christ.
 - Those who don’t have assurance, but are saved.
 - Example: A believer has fallen out of fellowship with the Lord due to a lack of spiritual disciplines or through unrepentant sin.
 - **James 5:19-20** *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*
 - Those who don’t have assurance, and are not saved.
 - Example: A nonbeliever who is fearful of the consequences of their sin or otherwise has a holy dread of their sin’s consequences, but hasn’t yet discovered the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - **Philippian Jailer, Acts 16:30** *He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*
 - Those who have assurance and are saved.
 - This is the blessed state in which all believers should strive to remain.
 - **Hebrews 10:22** *let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

- **Definition of Assurance:** *Assurance of salvation is a God-given confidence for every true believer in Christ of their present approval and future acceptance by their Father.*¹
 - While the feeling of assurance is *subjective*, the reality of assurance is *objective*. A believer in Jesus cannot lose their salvation, but due to various factors, we don't always feel this confidence in our own spirits.
- **Benefits of Assurance**
 - Assurance provides great comfort to the believer.
 - Assurance stimulates joy.
 - Assurance encourages holiness and obedience.
 - Assurance fuels praise.
 - Assurance disarms fear.
 - Others?
- **Threats to Our Assurance**
 - **The presence of sin.**
 - The gospel is completely transformative; those who believe in Christ are given a completely new heart (Ezekiel 36:26), new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17), and new purpose: to glorify God.
 - **Colossians 1:13** *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son...*
 - When we sin, we are working against our testimony. Our sin is what Christ paid for on the cross, and acknowledging him as savior requires repentance from those actions and attitudes that separated us from God.
 - **Romans 6:1-14** *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin... ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for*

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/assurance/>

righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

- A love for Christ requires a hatred of sin. When we embrace sin, we are declaring allegiance to our old enemy and rejecting the Lordship of Jesus over our lives.
 - Sin grieves the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), and because it's the Spirit that testifies to our belonging to Christ, the more we grieve Him, the less assured we are in our salvation.
- **Looking to the wrong sources.**
- Often, we judge ourselves on the basis of our progress of our faith, the measure of our affection, our consistency in discipline, and/or the good works we produce.
 - If those things are the *basis* of our assurance, then when those things are lacking, so too will our assurance.
 - This is a dangerous position because it deceptively reflects the truth that faith should produce good works, but ultimately shifts the foundation of our salvation to our own strength.
 - **The Truth:** The basis of our assurance is the same as the basis of our salvation: The mercy, grace, and power of Jesus Christ.
 - **John 6:37-39** *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.*
 - **Romans 8:29-30** *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*
 - **Romans 8:38** *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
- **Misunderstanding the nature of sanctification.**
- This is similar to the last challenge; sometimes Christians misunderstand the nature and process of sanctification and thus errantly assume they aren't in the faith.
 - Flawed logic: Christians have been saved from sin, and thus if I sin, I must not be a Christian.

- **The Truth:** Sanctification is the lifelong process of putting sin to death as a fruit of our faith, and includes periods of success and failure all dependent upon the grace and power of God. We still battle our sin nature, and will continue to do so until we die or Jesus returns.
 - See the entire book of 1 Corinthians; it was addressed to a very dysfunctional church of *believers*.
 - See Peter's denial of Jesus. What made him different than Judas, who also denied Christ?
 - See also Romans 7 where Paul details the ongoing battle that he, as a believer, has with sin, noting that he still doesn't do that which he should be doing and often does what he shouldn't be doing. However, he doesn't take this reality and assume he isn't in the faith; instead:
 - ***Romans 7:24-25*** *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*
- **Minimizing the abundance of Christ's grace.**
 - Sometimes believers, when grappling with the weight and sting of their sin, assume that their sin must be so great they must of "out-sinned" the grace of Christ.
 - Similar to looking to wrong sources for assurance, this is dangerous because it appears to mirror the truth that union with Christ should produce a hatred of and the mortification of sin, but errantly supposes that our sin is too great for Christ to forgive.
 - **The Truth:** There is no sin that Jesus cannot forgive, for to assert otherwise would make the power of sin and death more powerful than God and would empty Christ's atoning sacrifice of its sufficiency.
 - ***Romans 5:1-2*** *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*
 - ***1 Timothy 1:12-16*** *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.*

- **Hebrews 4:16** *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*
- **Romans 8:3-4** *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*
- **John 8:36** *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

○ **Mental health issues and spiritual weakness cloud our judgement.**

- Some Christians struggle with depression, anxiety, scrupulosity, and/or other issues which can cause or contribute to a constant doubt regarding their salvation.
- This is a variant of the aforementioned challenges, for it makes our emotions the arbiter of truth rather than God's Word.
- **The Truth:** Depression, anxiety, scrupulosity, and other contributors to spiritual weakness, while products of the fall and worthwhile adversaries to fight, are not in themselves indicators of being outside the grace of Christ nor do they have the power to remove your standing in Christ.
- The efficacy of our faith depends not on its measure, but on its object!
 - **Isaiah 42:3** *a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.*
 - **Psalms 34:18** *The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.*
 - **Isaiah 41:10** *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*
 - **Romans 8:35-39** *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

○ **Relentless attacks against our faith and calling.**

- Sometimes believers let their guard down in spiritual warfare, and when Satan's accusations come, guilt compounds and leads them to run away from God instead of toward him.

- When we sin, we feel the relational separation that sin brings, and Satan uses that failure to draw a wedge between us and God.
- This creates a downward spiral of sin and guilt wherein we assume God doesn't want relationship with us, is angry with us, or will otherwise withhold his grace from us. This leads us to doubting the gospel and even delving deeper into sin (a "there's no hope for me" mentality).
- In this condition, it is sometimes hard to tell the difference between the Holy Spirit's voice of conviction and Satan's voice of condemnation.
- **The Truth:** While sin can grieve the Holy Spirit and conviction for sin is painful, repentance is always possible and the receipt of fresh grace is *always* available to the believer! God is glorified in the salvation of sinners; his love and gracious disposition toward those who acknowledge their sin and trust in Christ never changes.
 - **Acts 3:19-20** *Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus...*
 - **1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
 - **Psalms 103:17** *But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him...*
 - **Romans 8:5-6** *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*
 - **How to tell the difference between the Spirit's conviction and Satan's condemnation?** The Spirit is our helper and leads us into all truth (John 14), and the truth He magnifies is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Spirit wounds to heal, ultimately producing *peace* in the heart of a believer.
 - See also the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32.
- **Is Assurance Available?**
 - Scripture repeatedly cautions its readers about the deceitful nature of sin, and further includes warnings that often inspire doubt as to the availability of assurance.
 - **Hebrews 3:12** *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*
 - **1 Corinthians 10:12** *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*
 - **2 Corinthians 13:5** *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

- **2 Peter 1:10-11** *Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*
- **Hebrews 6:4-6** *For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.*
- **Hebrews 2:1** *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*
- **Hebrews 4:1** *Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.*
- These passages are not given for us to doubt our salvation; because the ultimate mark of salvation is perseverance, the thrust of these passages is to encourage believers to never relent in their pursuit of righteousness and fellowship with God as evidence of their new life in Him.
- In other words, the warnings and invitations to examine ourselves are revelatory in their nature:
 - **For nonbelievers**, they are given to reveal the lack of genuine faith such that they may repent and believe.
 - **For believers**, they are given to *bolster* our faith, revealing weak areas that can be addressed by grace and encouraging us in the progress that's already been made as evidence of transformation.
- Scripture is filled with assertions that assurance is not only possible, but ought to be pursued.
 - **1 Thessalonians 1:4-5** *For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.*
 - **Hebrews 10:21-22** *...since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*
 - **1 John 5:13** *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.*

- **How Assurance is Developed²**

- Assurance comes through faith in the promises of God.
 - **Hebrews 11:1** *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*
 - **Romans 4:20-21** *No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*
- Assurance is given by testimony of the Holy Spirit that we are children of God.
 - **Romans 8:16** *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...*
- Assurance is strengthened through increased obedience to and fellowship with God that evidences our conversion and a transformed life.
 - **Romans 6:17-18** *But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*
 - In other words, how we live reveals our true master to us and to others. (See also John 8:31-47).

- **Testing Our Faith**

- Thankfully, Scripture doesn't leave us without tests by which we can determine if we're in the faith. The book of 1 John, for example, was written in part for this purpose.
- The goal of such tests is not to tear down our faith, but build it up!
 - Since transformation is the fruit of the gospel, such tests give us what to look for; the more fruit we find, the more assured we become.
 - Where examination shows a deficiency, it should drive us to repentance, coming again to Jesus Christ as the fount of our salvation for forgiveness and grace.
- Scriptural tests of faith...³
 - ...Serve as internal confirmation, showing that God's love is in you (1 John 2:5)
 - ...Show the connection between what we believe and how we live, giving assurance that the Spirit is working (1 John 4:13)
 - ...Enable us to gain confidence that our faith is genuine and that we belong to God (1 John 5:13).

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/assurance/>

³ Adapted from <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/detrinitate/three-tests-of-your-faith-for-full-assurance>

Tests of Faith

Below are tests of faith taken from 1 John. There are many fruits of faith given in Scripture, but 1 John uniquely addresses this topic.

- **Tests of Belief & Doctrine**

- Do you believe that Jesus is God, and that He became flesh to redeem us from our sin?
 - **1 John 4:2-3** *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.*
- Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah sent by God who lived a perfect life, died a sin-atoning death on the cross, was resurrected from the dead as a propitiation for sin?
 - **1 John 5:1** *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.*
 - **1 John 2:2** *He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*
- Do you personally have faith in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins?
 - **1 John 5:5** *Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

- **Tests of Holiness**

- Do you have a pattern of keeping the commandments of God as an expression of your faith in God?
 - **1 John 2:3-6** *And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*
- Does your life reflect a love for the world, or an increasing love for God?
 - **1 John 2:15-16** *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.*
- Does the Spirit testify to your belonging to God, called out for His holy purposes?
 - **1 John 4:13** *By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*
- Do you have a pattern of overcoming the world (*desires of the flesh, the pride of life*)?
 - **1 John 5:4-5** *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*

- Do you have a hatred of sin and increasing love and practice of righteousness?
 - **1 John 2:29** *If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.*
 - **1 John 3:7** *Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.*
 - **1 John 3:10** *By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God...*
 - **1 John 1:5-10** *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*
- Do you have a conscience that's sensitive to sin, evidenced by confession and repentance?
 - **1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

• Tests of Affection

- Do you have a love for Jesus evidenced by a desire to abide in Him through His Word and through prayer?
 - **1 John 4:15** *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*
 - **1 John 4:16** *So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*
- Do you have a hope rooted in the love that God has for you, resulting in a desire to be pure and holy like your heavenly Father?
 - **1 John 3:1-3** *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*
- Do you have an increasing love for others and the body of Christ, evidenced by a desire to be with them, serve them, and edify them?
 - **1 John 3:14** *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.*
 - **1 John 4:7-8** *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*
 - **1 John 3:10** *By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*