

The Biblical Basis for Assurance of Salvation

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Introduction

- Liberal Christian churches, along with other aberrant expressions of Christianity, may claim that one cannot know whether or not he is truly saved
- Some conservative Christian churches teach that one can be absolutely certain of one's salvation merely by ascertaining a place, date, and time when he "asked Jesus into his heart"
- The purpose of this talk is to show that both claims are in error by analysis of
 - the Lordship of Christ
 - John's 1st epistle and related passages throughout the Bible
- When does erroneous teaching become heresy?
- The talk will conclude with a practical exhortation

“Lord” in the New Testament

- The Greek word translated “Lord” in the New Testament is not merely an expression of Deity; to refer to someone as “Lord” was a recognition of his position of ownership and rulership
 - “Lord signifies having power and authority” - Vine
 - “In the Koine...*kurios* is the owner of slaves and property and has the sense of having full authority” - Kittel
 - Lord is expressive not only of the metaphysical nature of Deity, but also “of sovereign rulership in actual exercise, evoking obedient service” - Baker
 - It was Sarah’s obedience to Abraham which demonstrated her relationship to her husband as “lord” over her (1 Peter 3:6)
 - Note “come to Me” in Luke 6:46f (cf: John 6):
 - Christ says all those who “come to Me” exhibit obedience which is produced by truly saving faith (cf. James 2)
 - Those who don’t “come to Me” *always* come to “great ruin”

“Lord” and Salvation

The term Lord when referred to Jesus is associated with salvation

- Romans 10:9 – confess Jesus as Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3)
- Matthew 7:21
 - It is not sufficient to merely call Him Lord: there must be accompanying obedience (cf. Luke 6:46; 1 John 2:6)
 - Many who have been taught incorrectly about the gospel will be surprised on the day of judgment
- Matthew 24:48-51
 - The unfaithful servant did not just lose his reward
 - Unless they come to repentance before they die, all “unfaithful servants” will spend eternity in hell
- Psalm 2:12
 - Those who refuse to “kiss the Son” will “perish” (i.e., in hell)
 - The kiss was a sign of unconditional submission and allegiance
- A Greek word meaning “obey” is often substituted for “believe” with respect to the gospel (John 3:36; Romans 6:16; Galatians 3:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 3:18,19; 5:9; 1 Peter 3:1; 4:17)

Biblical Assurance of Salvation – Light

- The believer's life is normally characterized by “walking in the light” (1 John 1:7)
- Walking in the light is walking in
 - fellowship with God (1 John 1:6)
 - agreement with God (Amos 3:3)
 - victory over sin (1 John 1:7; Romans 6:17,18)
 - obedience to the Word of God (Isaiah 8:20; John 3:21; Psalm 119:105)
 - the love of the brethren (1 John 2:9,10)
 - awareness of the presence of God (Job 33:26 – 28)
- Although the above is the norm, it is possible for us, as Christians, to occasionally experience periods in our lives when God withdraws our awareness of His presence (Isaiah 50:10)

Biblical Assurance of Salvation – Sin

- The believer's life is characterized by
 - confession of sin (1 John 1:9), in contrast to the various denials of sin by the unregenerate (1 John 1:8,10)
 - obedience to the commandments of God (1 John 2:3,4; 3:22–24)
 - love of the brethren, which is *defined* in terms of obedience to the law of God (1 John 5:2,3; Romans 13:10)
 - the practice of righteousness and an increasingly holy lifestyle, i.e., one which is not dominated by sin (1 John 2:29 – 3:10)
- Although believers can and do sin
 - sin does not have dominion over them (1 John 2:1)
 - “*But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*” (Romans 6:17,18)

Biblical Assurance of Salvation – Sanctification

- All real Christians live a life of sanctification (or holiness) before God, though not perfectly
 - “A good tree is known by its fruit” (Luke 6); habitual, willful sin is not the characteristic of a Christian’s life (1 John 3)
 - Without sanctification of heart and life, results of ongoing repentance, one has no basis for assurance (Hebrews 12:14)
- Repentance is
 - a change of direction, from having self on the throne to unconditionally surrendering to Christ as Lord
 - an essential part of the gospel message and required for salvation (Luke 24:47; Acts 11:18; 20:21; 26:20; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 2 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 6:1)
 - like salvation, a gift of God (John 6:44; 2 Timothy 2:25)
 - the mechanism God uses in the process of sanctification, being conformed to Christ’s image (Philippians 1:6; Romans 8:29)

Biblical Assurance of Salvation

– The Holy Spirit

- The presence and work of the Holy Spirit in one's life is proof that he is a true Christian (1 John 3:24; 4:13)
- The Holy Spirit
 - convicts the sinner (John 16:8)
 - regenerates the sinner (John 3:3–8)
 - testifies to the believer
 - that he is a child of God (Romans 8:16)
 - about Christ (John 15:26)
 - sanctifies the believer, i.e., conforms the believer into the image of Christ (John 17:17; Ezekiel 36:27)

Biblical Assurance of Salvation – Perseverance

- All real Christians persevere until death (John 10:28; Hebrews 3:14; 2 Timothy 1:12)
 - WSC: All who ultimately escape the wrath of God are given the grace to persevere in holiness, diligently availing themselves of the means of grace until death (Q. 85)
 - Those who apostatize must *never* be given assurance of salvation by Christians (1 John 2:19)
 - We dare not give anyone who is unwilling to do the will of God (that is, unwilling to obey Scripture) any assurance of salvation (John 7:17)

Biblical Assurance of Salvation – Doctrine

- The believer's life is characterized by
 - diligent adherence to apostolic doctrine, i.e., the Bible (1 John 4:6; Isaiah 8:20)
 - acknowledging the Son as “having come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2,3; 2 John 7) as well as being God, Lord, Prophet, Priest, Ruler of the Nations, etc. (Romans 10:9; Hebrews 3:1; Job 33:23,24; Psalms 2:12; Revelation 1:5)
 - an attitude that God's law is “not burdensome” (1 John 5:3)
 - diligence to live in accord with biblical doctrine, viewing all of life with biblical presuppositions (Psalm 119:105; 1 John 2:5)
 - confidence that whatever God does is right: “in Him is no darkness at all” implies that no one can judge God's actions (1 John 1:5)

Biblical Assurance of Salvation – Negative

When any of these things characterize our lives:

- habitual sin (i.e., living under sin's domination)
 - either hating (resisting or causing to stumble) or failing to love (not fulfilling God's law toward) the brethren
 - withdrawal from the church and/or the means of grace
 - denial of Christ's Deity and incarnation
 - not "walking as He walked" (we are to walk under His Lordship even as He walked under the Lordship of the Father)
 - denial of the authority of the Bible
 - thinking that God's commands are burdensome
 - spurning His commands without remorse (i.e., practicing lawlessness)
 - habitual stumbling at the slightest tribulation or persecution
 - allowing the cares of riches or the world to choke out the Word
- then we have *no basis for assurance of our own salvation*

Carnal Christian?

- Romans 8:5–9
 - A carnal person is one who is “in the flesh” – an enemy of God
 - A person who is “in the Spirit” is a Christian
 - War between Spirit and flesh is waging inside every Christian
 - In this sense every Christian is both carnal and spiritual
- 1 Corinthians 3:1–4
 - Although the term “carnal Christian” never occurs in the Bible, Paul did ask the Corinthians, who were acting quite immaturely, if they were not carnal
 - The term carnal there refers to “babes in Christ” whose sanctification has not yet brought about much in the way of fundamental changes to their lives
 - By Scripture we understand that true Christians will not and cannot stay carnal in this sense, i.e., they will *not always* be dominated by “the flesh” (Hebrews 12:14)

Carnal Christian *Heresy*?

- Therefore, no one is “off the hook” for bowing to the Lordship of Christ; surrender to Him as Lord or perish in hell (Psalm 2:12)
- Heresy is doctrine which contradicts the teaching of the Bible on the very basics of salvation
- *The teaching that one can be saved by merely trusting in Christ as Savior without an accompanying unconditional surrender to Him as Lord has been regarded as heresy by mainstream Christianity since the early church*
- The carnal Christian heresy (also called “easy believism”) is dangerous because
 - it leads people to believe they’re saved when they may not be
 - to preach that one can be saved without surrender to Christ as Lord is to preach “another gospel” and risk damnation!
(Galatians 1:8,9)

A Serious Matter

If the professed convert...does not mean to attend to [the revealed will of God]..., it is your duty to assure him that he is *not* saved. Do you imagine that the gospel is magnified or God glorified by...telling [nonchristians] that they may be saved at this moment by simply accepting Christ as their Savior, while they are wedded to their idols and their hearts are still in love with sin? If I do so, I tell them a lie, pervert the gospel, insult Christ, and turn the grace of God into lasciviousness” (C. H. Spurgeon - emphasis added)

Practical Applications

- Modern evangelicals have
 - marketed the gospel with catchy slogans, such as “Smile, God loves you”
 - attracted a mixed multitude, many of whom are content in thinking they have “fire insurance” through “easy believism”
- Challenges to nonchristians with more biblical content would be
 - “Tremble! God is a consuming fire.”
 - “Submit to the Son as Lord lest He be angry and you perish.”
 - “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”
- Should we fear that these more biblical challenges may cause some people to hesitate before they come to Christ? (Hebrews 6:4–6)
- Our success in preaching the gospel should not be measured in numbers of “decisions” or numbers of people who “prayed to receive Christ” but in numbers who persevere in holiness

Conclusion

- We *dare not* give people the false hope that they can accept Christ as Savior, without unconditional surrender to Him as Lord, and still escape the wrath of God (1 John 2:17)
- I beg of you to
 - unconditionally surrender to Christ as Lord
 - never give people false assurance with “another gospel”
- Scripture warns of a “faith” that cannot save
- Examine yourselves, and make your calling and election sure!
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