

Assurance of Salvation

by Ron Banuk

1 January 2010

***If you do not have the Assurance of Salvation,
you should spend every waking moment until you have found it!***

Two things are essential to the Assurance of Salvation: belief and works. While belief is essential for Salvation, works are necessary for the assurance that must follow. Regarding belief, the OT psalmist in recounting the history of Israel wrote that the Lord was full of wrath:

...because they did not believe in God and did not trust in his salvation.

--Psalm 78:22 NASU

Regarding works, David write in Psalm 62:

He only is my rock and my salvation...

And lovingkindness is Yours, O Lord,

For You recompense a man according to his work.

So we are saved by our faith and rewarded by our works. One of those rewards is the Assurance of Salvation. That is one of the links between faith and works. James, the half brother of Jesus also linked faith and works with these words:

But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

--James 2:20

Salvation by Faith

Of the 200 references to Salvation in the NT, all have the underlying element of faith. In Acts 16:31, Paul and Silas told their jailer after the earthquake:

...and after he (Jailer) brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Faith is the cause of our salvation. Faith related words that show the result of the transformation (regeneration) or the process of transformation are "born again" (John 3:3), or "receiving him" (John 1:12), or becoming "children of God" (John 1:12), or being "the one who has endured to the end" (Mt 10:22), or being the one who "calls on the name of the Lord" (Acts 2:21 and Ro 10:13), or being saved "by grace" (Ephesians 2:5), or being saved "according to his mercy" (Titus 3:5), but ultimately Luke the physician states the cause of salvation when he said: "Your faith has saved you." (Luke 7:50).

Necessary Works

Quite emphatically, James said that "*faith without works is useless*". But is there any work necessary for salvation? After Jesus' greatest miracle¹, the feeding of the 5000, John, the church theologian, recorded Jesus as saying:

What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God? 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He has sent." (John 6:28-29)

So as you can see, there is no work for Salvation other than belief or faith, which has already been shown to be an OT as well as NT concept. However, all the tests for the Assurance of Salvation as given by John concern works which include the understanding of Scripture. We will cover these tests later on, but first, let's examine faith in detail.

Faith

Even though works are required for the Assurance of Salvation, those works are faith based. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his teachings is not an easy virtue to continually augment. The Christian should be constantly growing in faith. His faith begins small—the size of a mustard seed (Mt 17:20). So let's look at how the Apostles' faith began the size of a mustard seed and increased to the description given by Luke in the Book of Acts when speaking of Stephen and Barnabas. Luke alluded to them as being "*full of the Holy Spirit and faith*" (Acts 6:5 and 11:24).

We as Christians know Jesus, the Messiah, from Scripture in three ways: 1) how he was prophesied to come as the Scepter of Israel (Nu 24:17), 2) what he did on Earth as the Lamb of God (John 1:29), and 3) how he is prophesied to return as the Bridegroom (Rev 19:9), Faithful and True (Rev 19:11). The Apostles, like Christians today knew the Messiah in ways 1 and 3. But the Apostles also knew Jesus in the second way—one that Christians will not experience until the Millennium—and that is seeing Jesus on the Earth in the flesh. The Apostles knew him this way, as the subdued Shekinah Glory in human form, for three and a half years. Yet this was not enough to make them, as we shall see, "*full of the Holy Spirit and faith*". This is the forgotten story of Easter.

Growth of the Apostles' Faith

Let's look at four stages in the growth of the Apostles' faith.

1) The Hope

The Apostle's faith began with the hope exemplified by the believing remnant represented by Boaz in the Book of Ruth and by Simeon and Anna when Jesus was a baby. The Apostles-to-be believed in their Scripture that the Messiah first hinted at in the *Protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 would come even though many Jews were saying at that time that the "*stem of Jesse*" (Is 11:1) had passed since Herod the Idumaeen was their appointed king, a man not of the line of David.

2) The Gospel of the Kingdom

This hope for the Messiah, found roots when the Apostles-to-be in Galilee heard that John the Baptist had baptized Jesus, a prophet, in the Jordan River and that a great sign was heard by a large crowd when the heavens were opened (Luke 3:21-22). This prophet was preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, which included repentance (Mt 4:17), righteousness (Mt 5:20), and being born again (John 3:3). Disciples came to Jesus from John the Baptist and fishermen followed him from Galilee. The Apostles-to-be observed many miracles in wonderment. Jesus' seventh miracle, the healing of a leper, was his first Messianic miracle. This was a miracle that Jewish tradition said that only Messiah would do. After this, the chief priests from Jerusalem began following him. Then in rapid succession, Jesus chose his 12 Apostles and gave his Sermon on the Mount which denounced the manner in which the Jews were keeping the Law. He then raised the widow's dead son at Nain and performed his second Messianic miracle by healing a blind and dumb demoniac. Each succeeding miracle increased the faith of his disciples.

3) The Rejection and Aftermath

After Jesus' second Messianic miracle², the Jews were forced to judge him because of the popularity he was gaining. Since they could not reconcile his humiliating denunciation of their pompous keeping of the Law in his Sermon on the Mount, they falsely condemned him as a healer using the powers of Beelzebub. This was the national sin of the Jews. That very afternoon Jesus began speaking in parables, which he explained only to his disciples. On that same afternoon, Jesus prophesied the Sign of Jonah. Jesus then worked many more miracles including his third Messianic miracle³, healing a man born blind, and then inaugurated the Sign of Jonah⁴ by raising Lazarus from the dead. Then sandwiched between two predictions of his death and Resurrection to the Apostles (Mt 16:21-28; Mt 17:22-23), Jesus revealed his true Shekinah Glory at the Transfiguration on Mt. Hermon to his inner circle (Mt 17:1-13).

4) The Resurrection and the Apostles' Unbelief

Even after witnessing all of the foregoing and after being told by Jesus to go to Galilee where he would meet them after the Crucifixion, the Apostles huddled in fear in a house in Jerusalem. Even after John and Peter visited the empty tomb, Peter refused to believe the Messiah's prediction that he would be raised from the dead. John, however, did believe. The Apostles did not believe Mary Magdalene's nor the women's eyewitness report of his resurrection and they did not follow his command to leave rapidly for Galilee. Each of the eleven remaining Apostles, except for John, required an apparition of Jesus Christ to confirm their belief that he had indeed risen—and this after having been with him for 3 ½ years. And yet, all of these Apostles eventually became "*full of the Holy Spirit and faith*" and ten gave their lives as martyrs for the faith.

Point of the Apostles' Unbelief

Even though the Apostles lived and breathed with the Messiah for 3 ½ years, they still had to grow in faith after the Resurrection. The same is true for Christians today. (If you think that you have already arrived or reached the ultimate plateau in faith, maybe you are spiritually dead.) Even though the Apostles were told twice by Jesus before his death that he would be resurrected and twice by the women after his death that he had been resurrected, they did not believe. In a similar manner, many Christians today read the very words of Scripture below and refuse to “know” that they have the Assurance of Salvation:

*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you have eternal life.* 1 John 5:13

A Christian can read the above truly formidable verse and still not “know” that he is saved because his faith is still the size of a mustard seed and he is a soldier (2 Ti 2:3) in the army of Christ, but is still in boot camp with no works to show. Or a Christian can read the following verse:

*He who **believes** in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not **obey** the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him* (John 3:36)⁵.

and still not believe that he has eternal life because he feels that he has not obeyed the Son in a particular area of his life. What this person lacks, then, is the faith leading to obedience as manifest by the works in his life. Externally then, it is the works within one’s life that tempers one’s assurance. In many cases, I have seen that the practice of a particular sin in a person’s life can be the deluge that washes away assurance.

Test Questions for the Assurance of Salvation for the Believer from 1 John

1) Do you enjoy fellowship with God and with his saints? (1:6-7)

- Do you think they are hypocrites? Are they boring? Do you share few common interests?

2) Are you sensitive to sin? Do you know it when you see it? Does your sin bother you? (1:8-2:2)

- *Blessed are those who mourn* meaning over sin and injustice. When Jerusalem fell in 586 BC, God saved all who *sigh and groan* (EZ 9:4) meaning over sin.

3) Do you obey God’s commands? (2:3-6)

- Do you know the *Law of Christ* (1 Cor 9:21)? Do you obey Scripture nomothetically or do you *delight* (Ps 1:2, 40:8) in doing God’s will?

4) What is your favorite time of the day? Do you love your activities more than God? (2:12-17)

- Is it watching news on TV, coming home from work, walking in the park, or going out to eat? Is it reading Scripture, being of help to someone, or seeing God in his creation?

5) Do you love Jesus Christ and look forward to his return? (2:18-3:3)

- Is talk about the Rapture boring? Have you ever thought of your role in the Millennium?
- During the last 10 minutes, did you have one thought about Jesus Christ?

6) Do you have habitual (repetitive, willful, or the practice of) sin? (3:4-9; 5:18)

- Is there one sin that simply defines you and you cannot let go because it would mean a change in life? Is it eating, gambling, sex, drugs, workaholic, power, or collecting compulsively?

7) In a group, do you promote divisiveness or harmony? (3:10-18)

- Is there always an idiot that must be set straight? Where do all the pinheads come from? Have you ever tried to mediate an argument? Do you regularly see another's viewpoint?

8) Are your prayers almost always answered? (3:19-24; 5:14-17)

- When prayer is answered, record the fact so that your future requests gather hope from past responses. God wants to answer our prayers. If he is not, then something is wrong. Pray *in spirit* (as a Christian) *and truth* (John 4:23, Ro 8:9).

9) Do you try to abide in Jesus Christ? (3:24; 4:7-5:3)

- To use John's word, do you *abide* in the Lord to the point of keeping his commands? If you love somebody, you will never intentionally hurt that person (by sin).
- John not only did not sin against the Lord, but he was so close to him, he sensed before the others, what it was he wanted. He had the *mind of Christ* (1 Cor 2:16).

10) Is your discernment of right and wrong the same as other Christians? (4:1-6)

- Are you like the Bereans, testing doctrine with Scripture (Acts 17:10-11)?

11) Do you have inner peace? (4:18)

- Fear is sin. Scripture has said 11 times "*Do not fear nor be dismayed.*" Jesus has told us not to worry (Mt 6:25-34). Fear, worry, anxiety, and depression exist because we do not believe God is powerful enough to protect us and because we do not love him enough to know this.

12) Do you believe fundamental doctrine?

- a) The Bible is true, normative, and self-interpretive to the Christian.

- b) There is one eternal God in three persons, who cares about every person.
- c) Jesus Christ as the Son of God is fully God, fully man, and God-man. By his death on the cross, the price was paid for our sin.
- d) We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ and not by our works.
- e) We are required to live by the precepts of the Bible, which we must read or listen to.
- f) The Christian must pray daily.

How does a man get what he wants in life?

A great general once asked that question to his head chaplain who had 486 chaplains under him in the Third Army. Without waiting for a reply from Msgr. James O'Neil, General George Patton said there are three ways: Planning (That we do with our officers.), Working (That we do with our troops.), and Prayer (That we receive from the folks back home and do here among ourselves.) The same theory applies to acquiring the Assurance of Salvation: Plan using John's questions from 1 John; work at any admonition where you miss the mark, and pray. Yes, it does require work. And it will come, because John wrote that you will *know!*

Appendix

Ramifications of the Assurance of Salvation

1) It does not mean that you can sin at will, or sin and confess in an endless cycle. It does not mean you can "*practice*" (1 John 3:4) sin by remaining a gang member and therefore serve two masters. You cannot be a serial killer planning your next urge or a homosexual demanding acceptance. God will end your sin by sickness or death (1 Cor 11:30).

2) Belief that you cannot have the Assurance of Salvation is proof that you believe in salvation by works. This is because one will never be sure that his works have merited salvation. People who hold this view think that the Assurance of Salvation is egotistical. Some may begrudgingly admit to an assurance that is distant and not immediate occurring only after a long stay in Purgatory. To this I would say that there is no mention of Purgatory in Scripture and Luke wrote in Romans 8:1 that "*there is no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus*".

3) Belief that one can lose one's faith⁶ due to "*affliction or persecution*" (Mt 13:21) or through the "*worry of the world and the deceitfulness of riches*" (Mt 13:22) does not mean that one cannot have the Assurance of Salvation. I have known rock-solid pastors who have believed that in very rare cases, one can lose one's faith. Contrary theologians would argue that the person who apparently wanders away never was saved in the first place. Even so, did not Jesus warn: *Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, Did we not prophesy in your name* (Mt 7:22)? I would venture to say that neither the person who supposedly wanders away, nor the person who cries *Lord, Lord* ever had the true Assurance of Salvation. This is why it is imperative to attain it.

If you do not have the Assurance of Salvation,

you should spend every waking moment until you have found it!

¹ Greatest Miracle: Miracle #19 of 35 was not great because of its thaumaturgical aspects, but because of the effect it had on the crowd and the disciples and, for that matter, people today.

² Second Messianic Miracle: Miracle #12 of 35 healing a blind and dumb demoniac (Mt 12:22 and Luke 11:14)

³ Third Messianic Miracle: Miracle #27 of 35 healing a man born blind (John 9:1-7)

⁴ Sign of Jonah: This was announced immediately after Jesus' national rejection by the Jews (Mt 12:39, 16:4; Lk 11:29). It includes the resurrections of Lazarus, Jesus, and the Two Witnesses or Two Anointed Ones.

⁵ If this verse were rewritten to say: He who believes and obeys in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, so that it appears structurally like Mark 16:16, then the meaning would be changed and obedience would become the key to salvation. As it is actually written, belief is the key to salvation and belief not leading to obedience results in condemnation.

⁶ The person who believes that it is possible to fall away can have the Assurance of Salvation knowing that he himself will not fall away just as the well-adjusted person standing in the subway near the third-rail-alive sign has no fear of casting himself upon the rail. If one does not believe that by free will one still has the power of contrary choice after being saved, then that same person would have to say that Jesus' temptation by Satan was a sham since he never could really have been tempted to sin and that the testing of Jesus as the spotless and unblemished (Ex 12:5 and 1 Peter 1:19) Lamb of God according to Exodus 12 was also a sham for the same reason.