

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

In 2Peter 1, the apostle affirms how God's "*divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.*" Jesus saves and transforms. You are born again to believe in Him, then become like Him, as you live for Him by His power within. Peter says be aware, be persistent, be sure, be stirred up.

1- BE AWARE. 2Peter 1:10 says, "*be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.*" Peter says "*make every effort to supplement your faith*" with virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. These "*keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" If you lack them, you're "*blind, having forgotten you were cleansed from your former sins.*" This is the opposite of an abiding assurance of salvation, the "flower of the Holy Spirit" that accompanies the fruit of the Spirit, which gives outward evidence of salvation as inward reality. Both follow your calling and election, as aspects of the sanctification of the saved believer. Works follow faith, not to get saved, but because you are saved. Look at RC Sproul's matrix of four possible responses to the question, "are you assured of your salvation?"

SAVED & KNOW IT? - You have trusted the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ alone for salvation, having been born again from above by the Holy Spirit, and are being transformed as you trust and obey God's Word of truth and grace. Living for Jesus, you have confidence in heaven when you die.

UN-SAVED & KNOW IT? - You are not trusting Christ and are not being transformed. You might look good on the outside and not appear to be trapped in sin. You might even often be in church. But you know you are not saved. The good news is, you can be saved, simply by trusting in Jesus.

SAVED & DON'T KNOW IT? - Maybe on Sunday you sense assurance of faith, but not on days when your attitude or behavior seems so un-Christ-like. Some people don't think it's possible or proper, or they seek a mystical experience of assurance, like false teachers Peter warns against. Typical people in the pew say, "I hope I'll go to heaven, as I think God knows how hard I've tried." Such unsound theology ignores simply believing the weight of what Scripture says. Once saved, you should know it and show it.

UN-SAVED & DON'T KNOW IT? - This is the most dangerous position to be in - to think that you are saved, only to hear at heaven's gate "*depart from Me, for I never knew you.*" That's why Peter says "*be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure.*" This applies to all four categories.

Sproul says, "Bad theology can produce false assurance. Good theology leads to true assurance." If believers understood the Bible better they would have assurance. Scripture teaches salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone according to Scripture alone to the glory of God alone. Faith is believing what God says, by putting your trust in Jesus. Works is your own efforts. Justification is being declared right before God. Sproul says 500 years ago the church corrected the faulty idea that "*faith + works = justification.*" This equation in your theological calculator should return "*error!*" But many people think you must believe and behave to be saved; think right and live right, then God should accept you. Such "hope" is mere wishful thinking, as though your efforts must somehow complete your faith.

Errors of faulty works-righteousness religion-ism lead to false assurance. "**Baptismal regeneration**" suggests salvation happens with water, even though water baptism merely and powerfully pictures actual Spirit baptism. "**Decisional regeneration**" suggests salvation happens if you pray a certain prayer or respond a certain way, raising your hand, signing a card, or going forward in an evangelistic meeting.

But is your faith in what you did or in what Christ did? If Christ, then trust HIM! Faith has an object and only Christ is the trustworthy object of saving faith. Not your words or your works, but only Christ's work on the cross. Your works are the fruit of faith, not the root. 2Peter 1:1 says right standing with God is obtained by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Luther asks, "what is it about your miserable works and doings that you think could please God more than the sacrifice of His own Son?"

The correct equation is "*Faith = justification + works.*" Faith is the gift of God, coming by regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Then you are declared right before God, and your life transforms as He bears inner and outer witness that you are a child of God. Assurance of salvation is a ministration of the Holy Spirit, not an option. It comes with your calling and election. Romans 1:16 says, "*the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'the righteous shall live by faith.'*" You are justified by faith alone, but that faith is not alone, as it will be followed by works as you trust and obey. As Sproul says, "nobody has ever been saved by profession of faith; you must possess it as well as profess it." Faith is not magical words or mystical deeds. It is simply trusting Christ, which, thank God, is evidenced by a transformed life! □