

Prayer List

Sheila
Ophelia
Josh
Daniel
Olene

Services:

Sunday

Bible Class 9:00 a.m.
Assembly 9:50 a.m.
Assembly 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday

Bible Class 7:00 p.m.

Pinole Tidings

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The Search For Assurance

It was a discussion between preacher friends. We were wrestling with the question of how confident Christians ought to be, moment by moment, about their salvation. Some were arguing for an absolute assurance, others for a more cautious one. There is perhaps no concern which weaves its way so pervasively through the history of God's people as does the desire for assurance in one's relationship with God. Christians seem to vacillate between two contrasting themes of Scripture—assurance (1 John 5:3) and warning (1 Corinthians 10:12).

The subject of assurance has been hotly debated down through the centuries, especially in the Calvinist - Armenian controversies. Are all who have been converted to Christ unconditionally assured of their eternal salvation, or is the life of a Christian one of probation in which his relationship to God is conditioned on faithfulness? Nothing is more clearly established in Scripture than the possibility of apostasy. As certainly as the wicked can turn and be saved, so can the righteous fall and be lost (Ezekiel 18:21-26). A Christian's fellowship with his Father is dependent upon an ongoing spirit of obedient faith (Romans 11:19-22; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2; Colossians 1:22-23; Hebrews 3:6, 14).

Does this mean that we must live our lives in daily uncertainty about our relationship with God? Are we never, on this account,

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This Week's Question:

What king of Israel built the nations' capital at Samaria?

Answer To Last Week's Question:

Rabshakeh 2 Kgs 18:31

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to experience any moment - by- moment assurance of our hope? This is a question which troubles many Christians and deserves study.

The evidence of Scripture on this matter is unequivocal. The heavenly Father clearly intends for His children to know assurance. The cry of "Abba, Father" is a cry of joy and confidence which comes from being sons, not slaves, of the living God (Romans 8:15). Paul affirms that the very essence of the kingdom is "righteousness, peace and joy" (Romans 14:17) and names "love, joy and peace" as among the "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22). It goes without saying that there cannot be peace without assurance, and no joy without peace.

The apostle Paul himself is a great illustration of the confidence a Christian may have of his relationship with God. In the final hours of his life, he confidently affirms that "there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day" (2 Timothy 4:8). In his heart there was a certainty about his destiny, an assurance of his salvation.

It may be objected that the case of Paul, as an apostle, is different than our own. It should not be. As a sinner, he was saved by the grace of God just as you and I must be. Having no righteousness of his own (Philippians 3:9), he was "justified by faith in Christ" (Galatians 2:16).

There are only two ways to be justified before God—by my own perfect righteousness or by God's grace. Since all men have sinned (Romans 3:10, 23; Ecclesiastes 7:21), seeking to find peace with God through our own righteousness is a dead end street. Confidence in our salvation and the peace it produces can come only from God's grace and assured promises. It is what God has done, not what we have done, which gives assurance of salvation. We are justified by faith—looking up to God, not to ourselves (Romans 3:21-26).

Does this mean that we no longer have to be concerned about sin in our lives? To the contrary, the person who truly trusts in God as Father has never before fought sin so

ferociously nor hated it so intensely (Romans 6:1-14). True faith works the will of God (Romans 1:5; Galatians 5:6; James 2:14-26). True love keeps the commandments of Christ (John 14:15). Any failure to please our Savior will bring grief (2 Corinthians 7:10) and result in penitent confession (1 John 1:9).

But what if I am deceived and sin ignorantly? A single-minded will to do God's will (John 7:17) and a genuine love of His truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10) are an absolute defense against deception. If we trust in God with a whole heart, all that we yet need to know of His way will be revealed to us (Philippians 3:13-15). It is our task to bring to our Father a true heart. It is His task to redeem His trusting child, and He is liable to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

But what if I study God's word and do all I know to do to serve Him and still can't find peace in my heart about my salvation? Remember that "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things" (1 John 3:19-20). Put confidence in His promises, not your feelings.

God intends that the heart of every humble child of His be guarded by a peace which passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). The assurance of our hope comes to us moment by moment as we live our lives in faith. But it is not an assurance which is arrogant, cocky or heedless. No true servant of God, trusting Him, loving Him, ever dealt fast and loose with temptation or sin. The same one who said that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God" also said, "I buffet my body and bring it into bondage lest after I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected" (1 Corinthians 9:27). The assurance of God is a holy confidence joined to a sober vigilance, in order that what we now assuredly hold, by His grace, may never be lost.

Paul Earnhart