

Something
to Write
About

Sermons by J.R. Waller

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**Something
To Write About: Sermons
by J.R. Waller**

Something To Write About

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God Hears, God Answers

Prayer can be a difficult concept for many Christians; I myself often struggle with it. In a previous lesson we learned that the Holy Spirit helps us with prayer by interceding for us, even when we do not know what to say.

In this lesson we will be looking at the nature of prayer.

What happens then when a Christian prays? What exactly does prayer do for us and for God? And how does prayer relate to God's will? Lastly does God really hear and answer prayers?

Let's look at some foundational truths of prayer to help us better understand the nature and purpose of prayer.

I John 5:14-15 (KJV)

14) And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15) And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

Believers in Jesus Christ (Christians) can be fully confident that God hears their prayers when their prayers are made in accordance with His will.

When we make requests to God that align with His will He hears them and answers them one way or another (these are the petitions that we desired of Him).

Here then is the foundational truth - God hears prayers and answers them when prayers are made according to His will. It begs the question then: how do we know that our prayers align with His will?

We must ask then: what is God's will for the Christian and how does it relate to prayer? We need to know what God's will is for us so we can understand how praying relates to God's will.

I John 3:22 (KJV)

22) And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

Here is the answer! We saw earlier that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us and we know we have the petitions that we desired of Him. Now we see that we receive whatsoever we ask because we keep His commandments and do what is pleasing in His sight.

Therefore His will for us is to keep His commandments and do what is pleasing in His sight. Yet how do we keep His commandments and do what is pleasing in His sight?

To do this you must first and foremost become a Christian. You must accept Jesus' gift of salvation for your sins through His death on the cross. You believe and repent through faith and are then transformed. That is where accomplishing His will for our lives begins for only Jesus can transform us.

I Peter 3:9 (KJV)

9) The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

When we cry out to Him to save and forgive us for salvation we are accomplishing His will for God wills that all should come to Him to be saved and be born again. Salvation is always in God's will.

So to accomplish God's will by keeping His commandments and by doing what is pleasing in His sight you have to become a Christian first, after that you are transformed by the renewing of your mind and are a new creature. Your new motivation is to prove God's will and seek it out in your life.

Romans 12:2 (KJV)

2) And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

You see you cannot follow God's commands or do what is pleasing in His sight unless your mind is transformed through salvation. Additionally...

Galatians 2:20 (KJV)

20) I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Once saved you are a new man in whose soul dwells God in the form of the Holy Spirit. What is more the Holy Spirit at all times is working to make us more like Jesus...

Philippians 2:13 (KJV)

13) For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

It is a thing to be most thankful for indeed that we do not have to rely on ourselves but on Him to help us live for Him.

It is evidently clear then that God works within us as Christians to do His good pleasure and His will. Therefore, the strength and power necessary to follow God's commandments and do what is pleasing in His sight (to carry out His will for our lives) begins with Him and His strength in us.

Christian here is an important point: our prayers by their very nature and intent are always heard by God for He is the one who enables us to pray through His working in us to accomplish His will. Because of God we have the desire and intention to pray because we are a new creature in whom He works in us to make us more like Him.

So what happens when a Christian prays? And what exactly does prayer do for us and for God? It makes us more like Him and carries out His will. However there is more...

I Thessalonians 5:17 (KJV)

17) Pray without ceasing.

This simple verse is very important to understanding the nature of prayer as it relates to God's will. We are commanded according to Paul here to always be in a continual state of prayer however much as possible.

Because God speaks through His Word to the authors of the Bible so Paul is speaking for God here, therefore this is a commandment and since it is a commandment from God we are entitled to follow it.

I John 3:22 (KJV)

22) And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

Here then is the heart of the message...

- We receive answers to all prayers because we keep (follow) His commandments.
- Prayer is a commandment from God.
- Therefore prayers never go unheard or unanswered because prayer is a commandment we keep (follow).

Additionally this is how prayer relates to God's will...

- God hears all prayers that are in accordance with His will.
- If we keep His commandments we are following His will for us.
- Because prayer is a commandment we follow God hears all of our prayers.

Now reader you may be thinking about prayers that you think have not been heard or answered. It begs the question; are there some prayers God will not hear or answer? Does God really hear and answer all of our prayers?

The question to really ask is not whether God hears a Christian's prayers or answers them for we have seen that He always does, but instead we should ask...what do we receive for our prayers? This question provides us with excellent insights in regards to unanswered prayers.

Now why would we ask this? We ask this because humans measure things by what they get in return and this causes us problems when it comes to prayer.

Think about it, we weigh the meaning of things by what we get in return. For our labor at work what will we get paid? For the time spent studying what grade will we get? And the list goes on.

Often we do this in our Christian walks as well which while not being wrong in every situation it can be dangerous.

For example the desire to do things for God is always commendable but when the desire is combined with a desire to also work for God to receive things from God or from the world we must be careful. Remember though we are saved and working out God's will in our lives by serving Him we still battle the flesh and its selfish desires.

Do we want to work for God to store up treasures in Heaven? Certainly, but there is a point where desiring to work for God can be combined with selfish desires. This is where you must be careful.

For example the Christian who only works for God so he can attain great praise from others or so that he may accumulate a substantial fortune or the Christian who turns God's work or prayer into a this-for-that mentality where if he prays or does this then he will get that.

The this-for-that attitude toward prayer manifests itself in any number of things (praise, money, etc.) it does not matter. What matters is that while it is not wrong to work for God because it makes us feel good to serve Him, there can be a point where emotional or physical blessings (or in our case rewards) become the central reason for us praying or working for God in the first place.

That dear reader is not the way to approach working for God or prayer. Now let me be clear, praying for something you desire is not wrong, however the motive can be. Simply search your heart continually and ask what you are really wanting from a prayer, if there are selfish motives you need to cast them aside. If you are praying just for accolades and things for their own sake that is not a purely motivated prayer.

Again, it is not wrong to pray for things if your heart's motives are pure. God in fact wants us to enjoy our lives on earth but we need to always be mindful of our motives.

It is then prayers with selfish motives and/or prayers in which we selfishly expect something in return that cause us to complain when we see no answer to such prayers. Therefore are such prayers heard and answered by God? Yes because prayer is a commandment we follow and commandments are a part of His will however this does not mean God will answer them with an answer, instead we

should not be surprised that He respond with silence for silence is also an answer.

Now then there are many meaningful prayers that are not at all selfish and yet we still find no answer and wonder if they were heard at all.

Again since we as humans in the flesh often measure the success of an endeavor or effort by what we get in return it makes us confused about whether our prayers are really heard or answered by God when we cannot discern an answer.

What this looks like is when we pray and receive nothing in return, when this happens we immediately feel our prayers have not gone anywhere. Reader do not fall into the trap of thinking and feeling this way.

First thoughts and feelings are not always facts, but knowing prayers are always answered and heard is a fact. Second we have to remember that God's economy is not ours.

In fact when Jesus had His ministry in the flesh here on earth His teachings turned the worlds ideas upside down. We cannot be surprised then that God views prayer differently than we do.

While He always cares for us sometimes His withholding or not providing us with an answer in this life is in fact the answer to our prayers that He wants us to have in the here and now. No answer can be an acceptable answer even to a pure and purposeful prayer. Now while this sounds bad it's not, lets understand why.

You see prayers left unanswered in this life are only *perceived* by us to be left unanswered. We do not always know in this life if our prayers are answered however the fact that a prayer appears to be unanswered to us might in fact be the answer that God has given and/or wants for us regarding a given matter in this life.

We must also consider again that silence is also an acceptable answer. Jesus in fact did this in His earthly ministry, He did not always give an instant reply. Again as humans in the flesh we always want or expect an answer and surely we should not feel bad for wanting an answer to a pure prayer (conversely we should not expect an answer from a solely selfish prayer) but remember once more that God's economy is not ours. Remember that even a prayer left unanswered is done so for a reason that is in alignment with His will.

Even if we think a purely motivated prayer has not been answered the mere act of asking in prayer for something makes us more like Him because we are following His commandment to pray. Furthermore even if we do not know if God has answered a prayer of ours we know He is working things out according to His will simply by us praying in the first place.

Also, perhaps the answer He has is just Him allowing us to be more confident in Him, more obedient and/or more prayerful.

Remember as Christians we are His, we are new creatures and He is always using prayer to help us. Whether we know the answer or not in this life we always know He hears and answers our prayers.

Reader, prayer is essential. Prayers are always heard and prayers, whether we realize it or not are always answered even if we do not know the answer. Therefore do not get caught in the snare of thinking your prayers are not heard or answered simply because you do not perceive that they have been. Also do not expect selfish prayers to always have an answer either.

Ultimately let us remember what Paul told the church at Philippi...

Philippians 4:6-7 (KJV)

6) Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7) And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

We need to respond to life by not being anxious (be careful for nothing) and instead by praying in every thing. Only then we will have true peace of mind.

Reader, know that your prayers are always heard and always answered and be not worried but pray and accept and enjoy the peace of mind from God that comes from letting your requests be made known unto Him. Amen.

Following the New Way

When Jesus spent His ministry on earth His ways, doctrines and lessons marked radical departures from the ancient world's ideas, theories and knowledge. His way was (and still is) a new way.

Jesus' way turns mans ideas upside down and also makes them right side up. For instance Christianity is not a religion but a restoration of relationship to God. It is not works to earn salvation but grace and trust, and it is not about ritual but instead is about sanctification. It is a new way, and perhaps reader it is a new way for you today?

The new way is mentioned by that title in Hebrews 10, and today we will be looking at what this new way looks like for the Christian. What does a Christian need to know to travel along the new way?

It takes knowledge of God, a commitment to faith and service to others. The new way is many things and certainly there are more than just these three tenants however reader let this blueprint be a suitable guide for you along the new way.

Let's look at each of these tenants in detail and how God uses them to make us motivated, consistent and effective servants for Him.

Hebrews 10: 19-22 (KJV)

19) Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20) By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

21) And having an high priest over the house of God;

22) Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

The first tenant of the new way is that you must understand your faith; you must know it and have knowledge regarding it.

Christian reader, do you *know* you are born again? Do you *know* what Jesus thinks of you? Do you *know* what it is all about? How do you know what you know about your salvation and God? Is it based on facts or feelings?

These are necessary questions for they are foundational to everything else that flows from your life as a Christian. Knowledge of God and His word are essential to the Christian life.

Did you know that you can enter into God's presence with boldness? Verse 19 opens with a striking statement about boldness and that we can enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus out of boldness. Why can we be bold when it comes to entering into the holiest by the blood of Jesus? What is the holiest?

Hebrews as we have mentioned before was written with Jewish audiences in mind and the holiest refers to the Holy of Holies or the most Holy Place (Exodus 26:33 KJV).

In the Old Testament it was a section of the Tabernacle where the high priest would make an atonement for God's people once a year through the sprinkling of animal blood to cover the sins of God's chosen people (the Jewish nation).

It was strictly forbidden however for anyone other than the high priest to enter and even he had great qualifications for entrance. However in the New Testament and because of Jesus this is no longer the way by which man's sins are washed away. Jesus' blood on the cross has paid for all of our sins.

You see, as verse 20 points out, Jesus is a new and living way for us, put plainly Jesus is the way into God's presence be that while we are on this earth (through prayer for instance) or in heaven in which we will be in His very presence.

So you see Christian reader you can enter into God's presence with boldness and non-Christian reader you can come to Him for the very first time for salvation with that same boldness, you need not do anything but ask Jesus to save and forgive you from your sins and accept in belief and faith that He died for you.

When we come to Jesus for salvation I like to picture Him taking us by the hand and walking us towards God the Father in the holiest, that is in heaven, and introducing us to God as a new man.

This is because Jesus is our high priest. Did you know that He is your high priest? He is the one who permits you to enter into God's house and presence be it for salvation when we come to God for the first time or anytime during our Christian life and for anything.

You see because of Jesus' death on the cross for mankind anyone can enter God's presence and once more with boldness! You see, regarding your faith you must understand that God is approachable, in fact He comes to us first and draws us near to Him and what is more He desires us to come to Him for any need we may have.

In addition to Jesus' atoning work on the cross for us, He has also, as stated in verse 22, sprinkled our hearts from an evil or guilty conscience (again a reference to the Old Testament where animal sacrifices' blood was used as an atonement for one's sins) and has washed us clean with pure water. Reader do you *know* this?

This is why we can enter into God's presence with boldness, because we are God's children, we are clean, even when we do not feel like it. We can enter the royal court because we not only look the part but because we *are* part of the royal court. He is our King and we His servants.

Perhaps the most important things to know here are that when we draw near to God we can do so not only with boldness but with a heart full of assurance. We can be assured that we can come into His presence and we can be assured of our very faith in Him ("Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith").

The new way, that is Jesus, begins then with knowledge. Reader if you do not know what God has done for you or what is your new identity in Jesus you will not be able to travel with strength along the new way. Notice something about this knowledge however...it is not a limited knowledge.

What do we mean by limited knowledge? It is not man's knowledge but knowledge from and of God, of who He is and what He says.

Since man and the universe are tainted with sin from the fall in the garden of Eden our knowledge is by its very nature limited. Man has to rely on observations and feelings for knowledge, both of which are limited. Our eyes play tricks on us and our observations change over time.

You see man's knowledge changes. New discoveries bring about new knowledge and rid us of old knowledge, or sometimes the reverse takes effect, a new discovery shines light on a previously held knowledge that was once deemed correct showing now that it was in fact false. Also, man's knowledge is limited by physical limitations and sin, we simply can't understand everything either.

In addition knowledge of God is not knowledge limited to facts and experience, it is a knowledge that is filled with complete assurance of what we know. Why? Because we trust Jesus, His revealed words in the Bible and from Himself, of which all are one-hundred percent trustworthy and reliable.

Can you come to a knowledge of God through experience and feelings? They certainly play a part however the key here is that when the music stops and the feelings go away and you are left alone with your thoughts then *your* knowledge based on feelings can quickly disappear into the darkness of doubt. Why? Because it is *your* knowledge you are relying on, not God's. It is your own understanding and not a true knowledge of God Himself and His words.

In fact that was how the first sin was committed in the Garden in which the serpent caused Eve to doubt if God really said what He said, and Adam who was right there as well wondered it too. They listened to the serpent and drew their knowledge from him and from their own selves, not on what God actually said.

This is why we have to rely on God's word. God never changes, nor does the way, or the message. You see *our* knowledge looks like this...

Many Christians even after being born again struggle with thoughts like "why did God choose *me*?" or "why does God love *me*?" or even "*does* God love me? and "*are* His words in this matter really true, they can't be can they?"

This is when doubt creeps in because of our limited knowledge and slowly begins to take over. In times like these we have to go back to His words and immediately to Him in prayer. In moments like those know that you can enter His presence with boldness, that Jesus is on your side and that you have been made clean, that is true knowledge based on what Jesus and the Bible say.

This is one of the many amazing things about Christianity, our knowledge is based on truth, that is God's truth and we only have to accept it and be assured of it because only He is true. It is knowledge we can be assured of because we rely on what He says, not on ourselves.

We do not have to strain our minds with questions that we cannot know the answer to, or serve doubts caused by the limitations of our own emotions, theories, or interpretations, rather we listen to what God says, trust what He says and know we can be assured of our faith. His is the knowledge we must rely on.

Knowledge is the first step on the new way because it is the foundation that sustains us through assurance and it is this assurance that motivates us.

Knowledge of God and His word allows us to follow the next key tenant of the new way: being committed to a life of faith.

Hebrews 10:23 (KJV)

23) Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

Reader the next step to take on the new way is to keep to your faith through a commitment to your profession (or hope).

What does this look like? It looks like stability. Will you have ups and downs? Of course and you will take many steps back while taking many more forward however the one thing to remember is that God is faithful and has promised us many wonderful things. Think back again to the knowledge that you have of His promises, let that guide you.

Also do not waver. Because of His promises we can stay committed to Him and to our faith for our profession (our hope) is assured and we do not have to waver because His attributes, promises and statues never change or waver.

Still you must hold fast, not loosely, not occasionally but at all times, to your faith. The new way is a way, it is not a destination in and of itself. You should not just come to Jesus then stop at eternal security and call it a day.

You must walk along the new way and continue therein. Also, stopping and leaving the way then coming back then stopping again is not our prerogative either and while this surely happens to all of us, we must remain committed.

Why is a commitment to our faith the second key tenant of the new way? Because it allows the Christian to be consistent. Again we rely on Him through it all, "He is faithful" and He is consistent!

Knowledge then motivates and commitment establishes consistency. The new way is one built on motivation by true knowledge and consistency through commitment to our faith.

You see, not many things in life are consistent. Things in life come and go but what always remains are the same Christian truths yesterday, today and tomorrow, what is more the world yearns for consistency, the world which we must win for Jesus.

Consistent people can be trusted. This is why parents who discipline their children immediately and with consistency often raise better behaved children than parents who are inconsistent. Why? Because consistency sends the right message and inconsistency sends mixed messages. Which are people more inclined to trust?

As those who hold fast to our profession said profession must be consistent, it must always send the right message for the lost world will respond to the gospel message when it is presented consistently.

How many individuals do you know reader who do not want to trust the gospel because they are confused? They see mixed messages from all kinds of “churches” and “religions” that speak falsehoods and not God’s word alone.

Make sure the gospel message is right and that it is consistent, for God’s words are consistent. The more we and our churches speak only the truth of God’s word the more consistent we will be to a lost world and the greater the chance they will have of hearing the true gospel message.

What is more, a consistent life is one to be admired and desired, again nothing in this world can offer consistency, not money for you can never have enough, not power for it varies and not even you are consistent for you change over time, all that is consistent is God and He enables us to live a consistent life on this earth.

Now then, knowledge of God’s truths, and remaining committed to our faith are the two first major tenants of the new way however we must not neglect the third for it flows from these first two. This third tenant of the new way is service to God and to others.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (KJV)

24) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

25) Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Reader is your faith grounded upon a foundation of a knowledge of God and His word? Does that knowledge motivate you to consistently follow your profession and faith? If both of those are true then reader do they result in service to God and man? Put plainly are you an *effective* Christian? You see the most effective Christians serve in one way or another.

Now by effective we do not mean perfect or great or excellent but simply effective. Do you consider other Christians and instill in them a desire to show love and produce good works as Christians themselves? If so you are effective, you are carrying out God's will in your life to serve and follow Him and are also applying knowledge of God through action to others.

The effective Christian considers other Christians and provokes them to love and good works. You see nothing in life can be as selfless as this. When was the last time apart from Christianity that someone not only served another but did so to instill within them the very same love and good works they are displaying to them so that they may pass those attributes on to others as well?

This is in fact how the gospel advances in God's church, this has been the foundation of many hundreds of thousands of ministries!

We assemble together and we provoke each other to love and to good works. We are effectively carrying out the gospel by exhorting our fellow brethren and helping them serve as well. We are like chefs, we feed the flock just as Jesus did not just to fill each other's stomachs but to give each other the power and strength to feed others, to be filled and so they may be nourished and fill others up as well as we have filled them.

These actions encourage us and cultivate in us a desire to show the same love and good works done to us to others.

You see, the reason the church and Christianity have existed for so long, the reason why Christian families are strong and the reason why the gospel continues and will always continue to advance is because it is effective and God's servants are effective. The gospel spreads itself across time, nations and mankind through God and His people that are in service to Him.

Reader, when all of us are assured of the knowledge we have of Him and His word, when we are consistent in our profession and are effective through service to others we help God make us and others better all while also helping Him move the gospel along throughout history. This is the new way! Amen.

Fellow Lights

Matthew 5:14 (KJV)

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

This singular verse is one of the most recognizable in the Bible. It comes from Jesus' teachings on salt and light which are also some of His most recognized and powerful teachings from His earthly ministry.

Christian do you *know* that “you are” the light of the world? More importantly do you *know* that your identity has changed since you became a Christian? Notice the question was not asked do you *feel* that your identity has changed or do you *think* your identity has changed but do you *know* your identity has changed? Let us learn that we can *know* this truth in today's lesson and what this knowledge of being a light of the world means for our lives.

It is magnificent that Jesus says to us “you are” regarding our new identity as lights of the world. The statement is direct and intentional. Jesus did not choose to be allegorical or symbolic here, no He goes straight to the point: “you are the light of the world.”

Reader have you thought about the immensity of that statement? Often we can overlook shorter verses like this because we do not slow down to read through them carefully and critically. As a result the words can lose their impact.

This is where meditating on scripture and slowing down comes to our aid. When you read the Bible being able to comprehend what is going on is vital, and the best way to do that is to take it slow to let the meaning(s) be revealed to you. The verse above is one such verse where when you slow down you really see just how powerful it is.

This is no ordinary message, it's an extraordinary exclamation and a supernatural declaration from the Creator of the universe and yet who are we that we should have the honor and privilege to have Him tell us something like this? We former slaves to sin are now called lights of the world, it's astonishing. And the reason why He tells us this is even more astonishing; He is telling us so we may learn about our new identity in Him.

I Peter 2:9 (KJV)

9) But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light;

He can tell us this because we have a new identity in Him. We are His children, His holy citizens that have been called out of darkness.

Not only does what He says to us underscore our new identity but it also demonstrates God's choosing of us for we are a chosen generation. Think about it, He is not saying "someone is" or "they are" not someone else at all, but "you are", you Christians are the light of the world. And why "are we" the light of the world? Because we are His and He chose us, He chose you to be set apart into His marvelous light. That is what salvation, coming to Jesus in faith, believing on Him and asking Him to forgive you of your sins, does.

However we must *know* that "we are" for the statement is also the bestowing of an enormous responsibility to us as servants of our savior. It carries a tremendous weight to it for Jesus does not just call us lights of the world and then leave it at that, no there is tremendous meaning behind this statement that we must know and understand.

You see by Him telling us this He is teaching us something and teaching does not just stop at the fact, facts have discernible meanings behind them and this statement is no exception.

For example many times people need to tell us things about ourselves so we may learn something about ourselves. All of mankind thirsts for some semblance of purpose and meaning, it is ingrained in the fabric of our souls and yet without our identity in the One Who created us we will fail to attain an understanding of our true selves. Jesus says to us "you are" so we may know just one of the many new and great things about our new identity in Him after we accept His gift of salvation.

Yes, we are the light of the world, and how amazing that is! Yet what does it mean? What is Jesus trying to teach you reader by declaring this to you? You may know you are a light of the world but what does that really mean? It is a fact yes, but what lies behind that fact?

Romans 12:1-2 (KJV)

1) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2) And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

You see being a light of the world is not an end in itself, not at all, it involves much for light has a purpose.

When you become a Christian it is just the beginning of a journey towards Christ-likeness, that is sanctification or put simply adjusting your thoughts and actions to be more reflective of Jesus' thoughts and actions by learning and applying His Word to your life.

It's not perfection for the Christian does not attain that until heaven but it is a process with hills, valleys and mountaintops along the way that is all for Christ and His glory.

His living in us in the form of the Holy Spirit after we become Christians enables us, even while still sinners in the flesh in this world, to press on by following Him and serving others for being a light of the world means service to the world. Again, light serves a purpose, it shines and illuminates, it shows the way.

So the Christian life is series of lessons and learning, in fact you never stop learning as a Christian. This is why so much of Jesus' ministry was a teaching ministry, because learning is central to Christianity. Learning who you are, learning what life is all about, learning sound doctrine, all of this is vital.

If you are not committed to learning in your Christian life you will become stagnant and become preyed upon by sin and the enemy. What is more you will not be able to experience the joy that comes only by growing as a Christian and drawing closer to God in the process. In fact one of the most dangerous things in life is to have just a little bit of knowledge about something yet without a true understanding.

Hebrews 5:12-13 (KJV)

12) For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

13) For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

You must go from taking in the milk of the word to the meat of the word, that is being able to discern scripture and teach others, and as a light of the world both of those qualities are essential.

If you are to be of service to the world you must be dedicated to learning and to growth especially as it pertains to your new identity in Jesus. Remember that worshipping God with all of your mind is a precious privilege and something we all must do.

Mark 12:30 (KJV)

30) And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

So we know that we must be taught that we are the light of the world. Now then why is that?

First as we have alluded to it is because being taught this truth instills confidence and lifts us up, it shows us who we are and this is a good thing indeed for many Christians struggle with their identity as believers.

Each and every day is a choice to identify with God or man, each and every situation a test. Sometimes this causes Christians to struggle with the fact that they are in fact redeemed and made new, it is hard to wrap our minds around at times, how can we *really* be redeemed? Is that *really* our new identity? How can *we* be lights of the world?

Yet when Jesus tells us that we are the light of the world, it not only adds a dimension of true meaning to our lives (one of many that a life in Christ provides) but it also provides us with clarity in terms of our identity.

In fact that is what all of Jesus' teaching should do for us, it should make things clear. This is why going back to the Bible alone is always necessary along with getting instruction from sound Christian friends and churches.

So then reader are you *really* good enough? Does God *really* think highly of you? Can you *really* effect any change in a lost and broken world? Yes! Why? Because "ye are" the light of the world! And do not take my word for it, for He says it and He is never wrong. That is our confidence.

Jesus is teaching us here about our new identity in Him yet it does not end with this. He is also teaching us this so we can learn about our truest vocation in life and that is to love God and people through service to the world.

The fact is your identity is in Jesus for "you are the light of the world". This means that as a light you must cultivate and develop a life of service to mankind. How do we do this? By being exactly what He says we are, by being lights of the world. However it is not enough to know you are the light of the world, you must be what you know you are, be a light to the world, apply what you know about yourself in this way to help others by being a light for them.

I like to think of being a light of the world as being a beacon first and foremost for that is why Jesus teaches us that we are lights of the world, because we are beacons for the lost and for mankind. We stand out, we are different.

Remember light has a purpose, it shines and illuminates on the lives of the lost and shows them who they are and how they too can come to the Father for salvation and it also brightens their lives and provides as a lighthouse a safe haven for them, it shows them the way and calls them out of darkness.

Our light is not just meant for one person or people or a singular place but to the entire world. We are beacons to the one and only race, the human race which God created. The gospel never discriminates. What is more it is not selective, it is for the entire world as we must be too.

In terms of personal application you must realize that you are the light or beacon of your workplace, town, family, friends, church, and community. You see Christianity has no borders, never has, never will. In fact it reaches across two worlds, earth and heaven and across all time (eternity).

You have a responsibility to be what Jesus has told you that you are, He is teaching you to be more like Him by being a light for others. He is also teaching us (that is the church) to be more like Him and to serve others. Now what does this look like? How are lights of the world seen in the world?

Individually it is someone sharing the gospel to a friend, it's the Christian praying with someone, it's the Christian being an open ear or simply being there with another who is going through the impossible. Collectively it is a city upon a hill, a metropolis if you will of believers for that is what a city is, a city is composed of many and its structures are all unique.

Just as we individually are unique with different talents for serving Jesus, each of us is a unique light and building within the city upon a hill. When each of our talents and lights are combined the city shines forth and collectively accomplishes amazing things for mankind and most of all for God and His glory alone.

How does this city manifest itself on earth? Christians are lights of the world individually and also collectively through the coming together of individuals to form establishments that point to Jesus and that help mankind. Think about Christianity and philanthropy as just one example, the two have gone hand-in-hand together forever.

Look at human history, across Europe hospitals were first founded by Christians, in Asia multitudes of orphanages have been established, the slave trade was abolished due to Christians, in Africa education has been brought to millions - the list of examples is endless.

Social reform, medical aid, education, the core beginnings of all such causes went hand in hand with the gospel and still do today. Heal the body, help the poor and infirm, be a voice for the voiceless, train the mind, build up the family, all are Biblical and all are hallmarks of true civilization. This is what the light of the world accomplishes for God.

Every institution built upon God's rock is a beacon because its members are lights of the world and those members have collectively banded together to be a beacon for the lost, the downtrodden, the abused and the hurt no matter race or creed. The hospital, the orphanage, the nonprofit and college, all are beacons for the lost world, they are harbors of safety.

We must remember however that it is not necessarily these institutions that are the lights, though they certainly play a role, but any organizations most powerful component are its people, and we must remember that we are the lights of the world, both individually and collectively. And in addition God is our great leader who is always in charge and is to always receive the glory, that is what being a light is all about.

Also note that Jesus tells us the location of where He has set this city - upon a hill. This is because God's truths, God Himself and His people stand above the calamities of this world.

Isaiah 55:8-9 (KJV)

8) For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

9) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Just as a hill is above the landscape below God's ways are higher than man's ways, this is why His power and "cities" in this world appear as foolishness to the lost in this world.

I Corinthians 2:14 (KJV)

14) But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

And yet reader we know all the better for we have come to Jesus in faith, belief and repentance to save us from our sins and have been set on a new course in which we can spiritually discern the real truths of life and of God.

This is why we have been set upon a hill, so that mankind may see us. Even if man thinks what we are doing is foolishness again we know better and are here to provide clarity and help through love to the lost of the world.

God intentionally sets us and his groups of believers and subsequent institutions upon hills, where we can see out and beyond. From below the hill the lost come to us for they see us for miles and from our vantage point atop the hill we can see them coming to us. We know that if we will serve God that He will bring the lost to us.

Even when they are not yet come to us we know they will come for God draws them. Even when they have come but are unaware just of what they really need, we know why they have really come, they are seeking help that ultimately only God can provide. We know their souls are lost and that God is using us as stewards of His message to save and redeem them, to point the way to Him, to care for not just their bodies but their souls as lights of the world.

You see we are watchman looking out for what the lost of this world really need, soul care and a savior. Glory be to God for giving us that truly awesome privilege for His glory alone!

I suggest reader that most who climb the hill to come to us know not of their sinful condition but we know better, we are set upon a hill, we can see above what this world thinks and does not realize. We see and know the way for them to join us as fellow lights upon the hill and that way, the only way, is through Jesus, the one and only savior.

You see God draws men to us through the Holy Spirit residing within us. Let us not be vain and think that people come to see *us*, it is He who is in us that shines and whom the lost need to see, that is how and why we are lights of the world.

Let us not forget then that our light cannot be hidden for we are set upon hills. Once more it is God's intention to do this. You see the Christian life is not about hiding, or isolation, no it's about being visible, in fact reader if you are a Christian you cannot hide who you really are nor should you want to, you cannot change your new identity in Christ and especially because the world needs you.

Those who are climbing the hill by asking you about your faith, those that are climbing the hill for rest, healing, solace, food, shelter, and knowledge - to all we must be ready and willing to shine the light of Jesus upon their lives in service to them. Never prevent any from coming into our cities or lives for we have what they really need in this life and for eternity.

You have been set upon a hill for a purpose. It is part of your new identity in Christ. In addition knowing that a city cannot be hid shows us that even when we do work for Jesus and it seems as if the message does not go anywhere, that the harvest will not come, that we are struggling to do any work for Him, thinking that mankind simply does not see us or care about what we have to say, it is here that you must remember that a city upon a hill cannot be hid.

People can look away yet they still see our light and God is still working through us to help them. We will never know just how great and far God's reach has been for those whom we come in contact with until heaven where we will be pleasantly surprised and can rejoice with everyone who has been touched by His light through us forevermore.

Those who work in the church, in the hospitals, at the orphanage, at the university and all over, those parents who are trying to raise their children up in what is right, any and all who feel like their trying is in vain must remember their work as lights in the world cannot be hidden and that we cannot always see God working in others. Even when we don't *feel* like we are making a difference or it does not *seem* like we are making an impact for Jesus He is still and always working.

“You are” a light of the world and your light will always shine no matter what. Remember this is your new identity in Jesus, He has told you “you are”, always hold that close when it seems as if you are not making any progress for Him, for while it seems you are not rest assured that you are making progress for you are not hidden and God is always working.

May each of us know we are lights of the world, that we are set upon a hill for all mankind to see and to know that God's work never goes unnoticed both by man and by Him. May we serve Him today and forevermore as lights of the world. Amen.

Salvation Guaranteed: Prologue

The doctrine of assurance of salvation is an essential Christian doctrine. Over the course of the next few lessons we will look at specific ways by which we can be assured of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

This doctrine is not just important but vital. Salvation, coming to Jesus in faith, belief and repentance (turning away from sins to follow Him), is a once and for all act that eternally changes the believer's destiny and character. It is something that the believer can have full security in and be assured of, providing him with security for his life and a guarantee of his destiny.

Before we look at specific ways from scripture by which we can know that we are assured of our salvation, we must look at some reasons for why this doctrine is so important.

The reasons to follow are merely glances but I hope they provide you with a foundation as to why assurance of salvation is such an essential doctrine for the Christian.

First, assurance of salvation causes us to examine our life and question, in a healthy manner, if we really are born again.

In Order to Know We Are Saved

2 Corinthians 13:5 (KJV)

5) Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

Christian do you know that Jesus Christ is in you? Are you assured of that?

Assurance of salvation is an important doctrine because doubts regarding our salvation can cause us to open up our hearts to examine our lives to see if we really are believers in Jesus.

Now this can sound a bit scary. The challenge is that when we wrestle with this it can cause us to go down the proverbial rabbit hole of doubt which can sometimes be used by the enemy to distract and trip us up.

However the Christian must also know that being concerned about salvation and his or her standing with God is actually a good thing when looked upon with a healthy speculation.

Every now and again it is good to check yourself and to look back and remember a time when you know your life's trajectory changed for the better. Salvation does not always have to be an earth shaking event but you should be able to point to a change in your life from when you first believed in Jesus, asked Him to save you and repented of your sins.

There are many well-meaning people who consider themselves Christians who are actually not truly born again. I do not mention this to scare you, reader, but to re-orient you to Jesus. You see many people think or say they are Christians because their parents or family believe, or maybe out of guilt or fear of hell they were told to walk down an aisle. Yet in their hearts they never actually experienced a real transformation of spirit.

At the end of the day, reader, salvation must mean something to you. Examine your heart and seek God in this manner.

So then the doctrine of assurance of salvation is important because it causes both the lost and the believer to examine their hearts and to question if they really are born again. As a result you will either become a Christian for the very first time, or become free in Jesus and let Him handle that matter in your life, relying on Him alone for the assurance of your salvation.

Either way the outcome is good, this is why examining your life and questioning is a good thing. However a word of caution—once you are saved, it is settled once and for all, you do not need to come to Jesus for salvation again. It is settled and you can rest easy—do not let the enemy beguile you into endless rounds of doubts anymore. Be assured!

So We Know What Has Been Overcome

John 3:16 (KJV)

16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Another reason to study the doctrine of assurance of salvation is so that we can know and appreciate what has been overcome, namely death. It is important to understand that Jesus did not just overcome the physical moment of death for us by giving us eternal life with Him but also the fears and frightening emotions that we have regarding death.

Oftentimes misgivings regarding one's salvation and standing with God coincide with a fear of death and the afterlife.

Because no one has experienced physical death, when we think about it, it can cause us to recoil in response. It begs the question then— what can overcome these fears even in the believer? We can feel and know we are saved and yet death can scare us into doubt with great effect.

Why then does salvation and its assurance help us ward off these fears once and for all? Well first off when we are saved we are born again and in order for something new to be born, something old must die.

Remember in the preceding paragraph we mentioned that no one has experienced physical death? What about spiritual death though? Did you know Christian you have experienced this once and for all when you came to Jesus for salvation?

Galatians 2:20 (KJV)

20) I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

And

Romans 6:5-11 (KJV)

5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

6) Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

7) For he that is dead is freed from sin.

8) Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

9) Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

10) For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

11) Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Salvation is the great remedy of man's lost and sinful condition. Through it we become new men and women restored to what God originally intended us to be, set apart as a holy people for His pleasure, with a home set for us in Heaven.

There is no more fear of death because His death and resurrection overcame it for us along with all of the dark, emotional responses we may still feel toward it.

We have already died— our old selves that were slaves to sin died once and for all when we were born again when we trusted in Jesus for salvation. Spiritually we have been crucified with Christ and the death in our future is just a passing into Heaven.

You see if you are not saved then the physical death is not just that but a spiritual one as well where you will be separated from Jesus for eternity. That is the only death that need be feared.

For the Christian physical death is merely a transition to be with Jesus forever, there is nothing to fear for the only thing to be feared (a spiritual death) has already happened. It was not a spiritual death for all eternity but a spiritual death of the old man that was originally destined for an eternity apart from God because of sin. That part of you is no longer because you have been born again. How glorious that is!

Additionally we can be assured of our salvation and not fear death because Jesus overcame death through his resurrection on the third day.

However it is not just the act of physical death that we overcome through salvation's gift of life in Heaven eternal and Jesus overcoming the grave, but also the idea of death and all of its fears, anxieties and dreads. That is really what we overcome through Jesus. Remember, whosoever believeth in him should not perish. This alone allows us to mediate on and proclaim:

I Corinthians 15:55 (KJV)

15) O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

There is no sting in death for the Christian for the grave has no victory in our lives. However constant preoccupation with the fears of death can reverse this equation and make death become an idol and victor over us. Do not let that happen reader, know you're assured of your home in Heaven with your Creator and live this life to its fullest for Him without fear of death.

We must always remember that we can boast in this manner not because of what we have done but because of what Jesus has done for us. So then lay aside the weight of death.

Hebrews 12:1 (KJV)

1) Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2 Timothy 1:10 (KJV)

10) But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

What is it that can provide a balm of healing to man's deepest dreads of death? It is salvation and assurance of salvation. Knowing that we know is the remedy and we can know because Jesus has abolished death and brought us life and immortality with Him though the good news of His sacrifice for us.

So then being assured of your salvation is essential in that it causes us to examine our life in order that we may be assured that we really are children of God. It also puts to rest any fears of death in our lives because our self that was a slave to sin died with Jesus and was born again through salvation and because He overcame the grave for us.

To Help Us In Battling Our Flesh

Assurance of salvation (knowing our salvation is secure in Jesus) is also there to help us power on in this life despite the constant imprint of sin upon us.

Ephesians 1:13-14 (KJV)

13) In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

14) Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

When we are saved we are sealed with a guarantee by the Holy Spirit; God living in us and enabling us to live in ways that are Christ-like in character, mindset and attitude until we are fully perfected in Heaven for all eternity.

Yet we still wrestle with sin and the flesh in this life. There is tension and at times the tension can be so great that it can cause us to doubt our standing with God and our salvation.

Knowing we are saved does not always help us when sin besets us, specifically when our old nature battles us. For example even when our intentions are pure in a given circumstance the results of actions that follow even pure intentions sometimes are not pure.

Questions then plague our minds like “if I am really saved how can I and why do I still act this way even when I don’t want to?”

It sometimes feels like we are on a hamster wheel going in circles. So what do we do?

Well first we must remember in cases where our intentions are good and pure that we must focus on that aspect of the situation and know that while we want to go in the right direction we still must battle sin and our flesh.

While we have been spiritually reborn as saved Christians we still live in the flesh. We are no longer slaves to sin, as we know that old man has died with Christ, yet sin is still there in our lives in this life.

Sometimes this comes in the form of things within us or in the sinful world outside of us; regardless we must focus on our intentions and if they are motivated by God living in us.

Also sometimes feeling that we are saved is not enough because during times when sins beset us we “feel” as if we are not saved. When we may not feel we are saved it is important to know we are saved. Assurance of salvation provides the answer in these times. Let’s look at an example to make all of this clear.

Think of a professional Olympic athlete who has been chosen for the games. His fate is settled, he is and will always be a fully-fledged member of an elite class of athletes. No one can take that away from him.

It is just the same with the Christian— his name is sealed in the book of life and his life sealed with the Holy Spirit just as the athlete’s name is signed on papers and certificates and he is sealed with a seal by a governing athletic authority.

Yet what happens when the athlete does not stick to his diet or his exercise regime? What happens when he loses a competition? What happens when he tries but the competition does not turn out as he had intended it to even when his intentions were rightly motivated?

While hurt and not feeling like an Olympic athlete certainly crosses his mind in these times along with feelings of regret at not keeping on his course, he must cling to the fact that he is an Olympic athlete because of the powers that have deemed him so and nothing can erase his name from his papers of membership.

He must know this and get back up and keep at it. He need not fear or remain in a state of bad feeling. He must recognize that his status is assured and move forward. The same goes for the Christian.

There is also a high standard for the athlete and for the Christian. He being an Olympic level athlete means he must meet certain qualifications and standards as a professional. The Christian being God's child is also to live a life following God's will.

The title Olympic athlete has weight to it and when he fails, that weight can be enough to crush him but that is always the wrong response.

His title should be a call to get back up and keep at it; it is a weight that lifts him up, not one that tears him down. This is what our standing with God should do for us as Christians. Will we feel bad when we fail? Yes but we need not stay in that state because it does not erase who we are in Him nor our salvation in Him.

Again our intentions are guided by the Holy Spirit. He enables us to act in true accordance with God's will for our lives and in truest good. That is what we must center our attention firmly upon, just as the athlete must center his attention on his standing and his desire to be the best athlete he can be.

Is the Christian life hard? Yes. Is there weight to it? Certainly. While the vast riches and gravity of salvation can never be overstated, it is specifically the awe-inspiring gravity of salvation that can cause us to wonder how we can ever meet its standards or keep our salvation. This is especially true in those times when sin and the flesh hold us back and keep us from being all that we desire to be in Jesus. However this is a false way of looking at salvation.

We don't have to do anything to keep our salvation or even earn it in the first place. All we must do is accept Jesus' gift of salvation for us and then rest assured of the work He alone has done for us.

Reader what you have to realize and internalize right now and solidify by the end of this series is that you do not have to keep yourself in Jesus because God does that for you.

Your salvation is secure in Him; you can be fully assured of it. Sin will always be there, yet repent and move forward. Remember too that being saved is by grace alone.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (KJV)

8) For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9) Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Therefore take the burden and pressure off of yourself to maintain salvation and/or earn it. You don't have to—, salvation is not of works, it's of God and His grace.

If you have been trusting in yourself for salvation or trying to maintain a good standing with God to keep your salvation or to always prove you are a Christian it is the wrong way of approaching things and in fact it is selfish. In this state you become your own God and you think you know better than Him.

The good news is that God actually knows better. Therefore rely on Him for salvation and then you can be truly assured of its greatness for you and can live a life truly effective for Him.

Conclusion

We have looked at few foundational reasons for why studying assurance of salvation is important. Christian, be concerned about your salvation and use that concern as a way to truly examine your life in Christ to see if you have been truly born again.

Let assurance of salvation show you that you have not only overcome death because of Jesus but that you also have no reasons to fear it anymore. Live free of the fears of death to serve God.

Lastly, when sin drags you down into its mire of doubt, regret and shame, remember your name is still and will always be written in the book of life and that you are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Focus on your good intentions even when things go bad for that is truly who you really are. Lean not on your own strength to attain or maintain salvation with God, for it is His grace alone that saves us and keeps us assured of our salvation.

In our next lessons we will look at specific reasons for why we can know we are saved and be assured of our salvation in Jesus.

Salvation Guaranteed Part I – In God’s Hands

The doctrine of assurance of salvation is an essential Christian doctrine and over the course of the next few lessons we will look at specific ways by which we can be assured of our salvation in Jesus Christ. In this first of three lessons we will be looking at reason number one for why we can be assured of our salvation – because we are in God’s hands.

John 10:28-29 (KJV)

28) And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29) My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

God alone is the only person that can cure our anxieties and doubts when it comes to assurance of salvation. You must go to Him first and foremost. We will see in this lesson and in the lessons to come that the triune God (that is the trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) each help us with the matter of assurance of salvation.

In our verses above Jesus tells us directly that He gives us eternal life. Moreover immediately after that He says that we shall never parish. Notice Jesus does not stop with the first statement but continues to provide us with yet another promise in this matter.

Sometimes Christians are embarrassed or feel shame when they doubt their salvation but look at what Jesus says to us, He says He gives us eternal life. Now that would seem to be enough but He knows we need to know more. He does not stop there. Again He adds that we shall never perish.

One would think that knowing that through salvation you have eternal life is enough to calm most Christian’s minds yet Jesus knows that we all struggle with anxiety and that none are immune to doubts so He assures us we will live forever *and* that we will never die.

Once again Jesus does not stop there because after these two promises He states that no man shall pluck us out of His hand. That accounts for three amazing and precious promises by Him in regards to the security of our salvation!

Christian, one of the first hurdles to get through when it comes to being secure in your own heart and mind about your salvation in Jesus is that you must listen and trust His promises, just as you did when you asked Him to save you in the first place.

He tells you directly with three magnificent promises that you are His and that you are secure. He tells us these things because He knows and understands and wants you to feel and know you are safe in Him.

What is always truly astonishing about Christianity is that if you look you will find answers to all of the big questions and doubts you might have about life. In the weighty matters of purpose, destiny and the human condition the Bible and Jesus have all the answers.

As with any of the big questions of life that the Bible and Jesus address being assured of your salvation need not be an endless search for some hidden or secret truth nor is it a path you must take towards an enlightened state nor is it an answer that you must maintain by your own efforts.

When we look for them Jesus provides us with answers but when it comes to accepting those answers and learning them, we must trust Him. When it comes to Jesus, the Bible and its doctrines just knowing is not enough, you must trust the truths as well. This is sometimes difficult because it requires giving up control and replacing it with faith, however remember that Jesus' yoke and burden are in fact light.

Matthew 11:30 (KJV)

30) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

This is not to say by any means that the Christian life is easy, but it is to say that those who desire answers to life's toughest questions can find them easily and with certainty in direct terms from Jesus and His word.

John 6:35 (KJV)

35) And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

Reader, when you come to Jesus for anything, especially questions and doubts regarding your salvation, He will always provide you with the answer.

In today's main verses you can thirst and hunger no more for safety and security in the matter of salvation. Because you have come to Jesus for answers in this matter you shall never hunger again, and what is more if you have believed on Him you shall never thirst again. You are free to live for Him and move forward!

Being able to point to Jesus' own words to each and every one of us that we are safe and secure in Him if we have come to Him with acceptance, belief and confession is an incredible fact and an amazing source of comfort.

If you are struggling with this matter listen to Jesus' own words, not mine, not anyone else's but His. You don't have to search for answers on this, they are right there.

So we see that Jesus gives us eternal life and that we shall not perish. We also lastly see that no man shall pluck us out of His hand.

Notice that the first two promises, eternal life and no death, pertain to the afterlife. However the third promise, that no man shall pluck us out of His hand, deals with the here and now, with this life.

Sometimes we have doubts about assurance of salvation because of fears of the afterlife, if that is the case for you dear reader look at the first two promises from Jesus regarding eternal life and no death.

Other times however we have fears about assurance of salvation because of things that happen to us in this life. This is where the third promise helps us in that no man shall pluck us out of Jesus' hands.

Jesus' hands are not just any hands. They are the hands of a caring Father who is always walking along hand-in-hand with us on our Christian journey. They are the hands of the potter gently molding us to be more like Him.

They are the hands that healed the sick and infirm while Jesus conducted His earthly ministry. They are the hands that broke bread, the hands that calmed the seas when held out, they are no ordinary hands, they are the hands of our king and savior. They are the only hands that can protect us in this life from those who would appear to do us harm.

Romans 8:31 (KJV)

31) What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

Remember that no man can pluck us from Jesus' hands. That means that no one can take our salvation away from us. There are times in life when others hurt and rattle if not destroy the foundations of our faith.

The critic who works to tear down our confidence in Jesus, the family member who does not "approve" of us being a Christian, the boss that will not promote us because we identify as a Christian, the spouse that does not honor our faith, all of these people are but men who cannot take us out of Jesus' hands, they cannot shake salvation out of us, never and in fact we cannot let them either for we are lights in their worlds, we are there to help them.

We need to delve a bit deeper here however to understand that it is not just the aforementioned examples that can shake our faith, in fact the previous examples are actually more obvious examples yet there are more subtle and dangerous men that can hurt our assurance of salvation.

Some are well meaning but their efforts can have an ill effect. For example perhaps reader for you it is a preacher who has somehow convinced you that you are not "truly" saved, perhaps you feel like the intent of the first time that you responded to Jesus' call and message was not enough (it was by the way!) and that you must keep walking down an aisle to be saved?

Perhaps reader the "man" that is trying to pluck you out of Jesus hands is you? Please do not be scared by this comment but realize that sometimes we can get in our own way, many times in fact. Sometimes we become our own god's and think that only we can have all of the answers. Sometimes also our own worries cloud things. Remember we are but men and women and that we must trust God with all that we are...

Proverbs 3:5 (KJV)

5) Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

Regardless of who is shaking the foundations of your faith and causing you to question following Jesus and to doubt your salvation remember, no man can ever take you out of Jesus' hands.

Now then just when we might think there can be no more blessings from Jesus on this matter we also learn some very comforting promises in the second verse for this lesson.

John 10:29 (KJV)

29) My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

We are not just in Jesus hands...but we are in God's hands too! In fact, God gave us to Jesus so that He might save us in the first place.

The fact that God gave us to Jesus means that God's saving us is always intentional, it shows He cares about us. God allowed Jesus to die for the sins and redemption of all mankind. It was the only way, therefore reader does not God then know that we are saved when we first come to Him through Jesus for salvation? The answer is He absolutely knows!

Remember that salvation is a gift offered by God to all men and if we receive it He never takes it back. God is greater than all, and in His greatness He reached down from Heaven through His son Jesus to take us back into His hands and rescue us from eternal separation from Him and from death. It is all of grace!

Ephesians 2:8-9 (KJV)

8) For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9) Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Reader trust and rest in Jesus' and God's hands for your salvation. Amen!

Salvation Guaranteed Part II – We Bear Fruit

The doctrine of assurance of salvation is an essential Christian doctrine and this series of lessons looks at specific ways by which we can be assured of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

In the first lesson we learned that we can be assured of our salvation because we are safe and secure in God's hands. That lesson helped us build a stable and secure foundation regarding assurance of salvation, however perhaps you still have questions or doubts regarding your salvation? Perhaps you know you are safe in God's hands yet you still struggle with assurance?

In this lesson we will be looking at how the works we do for Jesus and the fruits we bear provide a source of evidence and assurance of our salvation.

Before we begin however you must know that good works are a result of salvation, not a condition for it.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (KJV)

8) For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9) Not of works, lest any man should boast.

You see because we are all sinners good works cannot earn favor or salvation from God; instead salvation is a gift we receive from God through acceptance, belief and confession.

We need Him to change us before we can change ourselves. When He saves us He transforms our lives from serving sin to serving Him. That is how men and women are truly changed.

In regards to our lives as Christians after we are saved good works then take on an entirely new meaning and significance. This does not mean however that works are the measure by which we should judge our lives as Christians or the lives of other Christians for as we will see later in this lesson the Christian life is ultimately a matter of the heart.

Nevertheless one of the principal purposes of the Christian life is to do good works for God, which flow from a changed heart, therefore it follows that if we are saved that good works will be an evidence of our salvation and this evidence provides a source for assurance of salvation.

Ephesians 2:10 (KJV)

10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

And

James 2:26 (KJV)

26) For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

God has good works planned for all His children, in fact we were created to do good for God!

Salvation though is the key that enables us to do this for we are born corrupt and in a fallen state but when we are saved we are spiritually reborn. Salvation therefore does not exist in a vacuum, it is not an end in and of itself. Rather salvation is a packaged deal that comes with results and produces great things within our hearts for the benefit of the world around us and to the glory of God. It is faith with works that makes us alive as Christians!

You can be logically assured of your salvation reader because of these facts, God does not just save us, He changes us, let that give you assurance and confidence.

How then do we walk in the good works that God has planned for us? Well think on this fact...God does not just save us and change us, He saves us and lives with us!

Galatians 5:25 (KJV)

25) If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

We must walk in the Spirit, that is in the Holy Spirit who enables us to live a life in service to God, the same Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

Reader if you are struggling with doubts about your salvation know first that you were saved to do good things. Next know that God lives in you and that you can now walk in the Spirit. You are not alone! Your assurance is not based on just the act of accepting Jesus gift of salvation but on all of these attributes of your new life *with* Jesus.

Romans 7:4-6 (KJV)

4) Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

5) For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

6) But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

You see salvation is a heart matter, it's a renewal, a literal change of heart. When it comes to assurance of salvation one of the greatest first evidences of salvation are not just the works we produce for God but the work that He has already done in our lives by giving us a new heart.

Reader you are now dead to the law, that is the law (Ten Commandments) that condemned you because of your sins. What is more you are now married to Jesus so that you can bring forth fruit unto God.

Salvation restores us to being people enabled to live for God, that is to serve and glorify Him. When we were unsaved sin worked in us to cause even our good works to be misguided in that they did not proceed from a regenerated heart. Don't get me wrong, unsaved individuals can do good by the worlds standards however because they have not been born again and are not a part of God's restored family their motivations will never be fully pure, notice Romans mentions "the motions of sins" are what caused us to act. Now though we serve in newness of spirit! We serve because we love God and want to glorify Him.

So then what kinds of works provide an evidence of salvation and can help us overcome doubts about assurance of salvation?

Works that proceed from a changed heart (the work that God has done for us) and works that proceed from walking in the Spirit. This is the foundation of the intent and the motivation of our new life in Jesus and service to Him. In fact this is where the fruits of the Spirit come from...

Galatians 5:22-23 (KJV)

22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23) Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

The desires in your heart to serve God, the things you do that are purely motivated for Him because of your new heart, those are all things to be confident in and things that are evidential of your salvation.

So reader know that God has changed your heart through salvation but also remember, especially if you still struggle in this matter, to rely on Him...

John 15:4-5 (KJV)

4) Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5) I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Just as we must walk in the Spirit so must we continually abide with Jesus.

Remember that your good fruits come from God, you do not have to rely on yourself nor should you for your resources are limited but God's resources are limitless.

As a Christian you can do nothing without Him. You must stay connected to the true vine. You must also remember that you have been born again, that is spiritually born again of God...

I John 4:7 (KJV)

7) Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

And...

I John 4:19 (KJV)

19) We love him, because he first loved us.

You show true purely directed love towards others because you have been reborn by God. Also pure love for others is the result of God's regeneration of your heart through salvation. So then abide in God and also know that you have been born of Him and that your good works come from Him.

When you consider abiding in God and loving others you must be careful not to judge yourself too harshly regarding your works. For example look not at the quantity of what you do for God but the quality of it.

It is all too easy to fall in the trap of comparison with other Christians in regards to works. Don't let that happen.

God's pace of making us more like Him is different for each and every one of us. Just as a parent might take more time teaching a sibling who needs more time to learn how to ride a bike than the other sibling. In fact isn't it often those who go through more time training and learning that turn out to be the most equipped in service for God?

Good works proceed out of the heart and actions that come from the heart are often more profound internally than their external results might imply. For example not all good works go noticed, nor should they, however God always sees the heart.

Additionally heart battles are not seen while life battles are more visible but one is not less important than the other in God's eyes. Therefore never judge a Christian by how good they *seem*, perhaps they are not so good inside. The opposite is also true, never be too quick to judge another Christian as not good enough for they may be stronger than you realize on the inside!

So then reader do not doubt your salvation because the good works you are committed to are not grandiose or noticed or as "good" as others. Remember God has transformed your heart and lives in you through the Holy Spirit, He sees and knows your intent, trust Him!

Simply be committed to good works and service, that is more than enough, and let Him work on continually making your heart to love Him more.

Matthew 5:16 (KJV)

16) Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Always make God's glory the priority, for it is then that your good works will truly shine. Also note that others will see your good works and they will glorify God too. This is pivotal not for your own pride but for said works to change someone else's life. You see the works we do for God are vitally important to a lost and dying world. This is why we work for God as Paul so stated to the church at Colossae...

Colossians 3:23 (KJV)

23) And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;

Work for God, not for man, give Him the glory and mankind will be changed.

This sums up our second lesson on assurance of salvation perfectly. Reader, know that your changed heart and good works are evidential of your salvation.

Understand that you must walk in the Spirit and abide in Jesus. Always set out to give God the glory in whatever you chose to do in life for when you do everything heartily unto the Lord you will no longer be burdened by doubts of your salvation but will rather have your heart assured of your salvation and focus on God who has great things in store for you to change mankind and the world.

Remember, salvation is just the very beginning! Amen!

Salvation Guaranteed Part III – Drawn & Chosen

The doctrine of assurance of salvation is an essential Christian doctrine and this series of lessons looks at specific ways by which we can be assured of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

In the first lesson we learned that we can be assured of our salvation because we are safe and secure in God's hands. That lesson helped us build a stable and secure foundation regarding assurance of salvation.

The second lesson taught about two tangible evidences of our salvation, first how the Christian's heart is changed and renewed and second how in light of our changed heart we bear fruit in service to God for His glory.

Nevertheless perhaps you still have questions or doubts regarding your salvation?

In this third and final lesson we will learn how we can be sure of our salvation because we are drawn and chosen by God. We will look at salvation as a process and by looking at it as such we will gain a wonderful and profound appreciation for it and a confidence in it that is steadfast.

In an effort to take hold of assurance of salvation, it is of tremendous help that you, reader, comprehend the process of salvation, specifically what goes into salvation. Have you ever thought about that?

It's ok if you have not for no one comes to Jesus with a theology degree, in fact it is the faith of a child that is best. However when you become a Christian it is important to look into what has changed in your life and to learn how that change took place in the first place.

For example maybe you have just accepted an offer for your dream job, or have gotten accepted into your dream college. That's great but how did you get there? There was no doubt a process.

It is the same with salvation. It is great to look back and see how you became a Christian and more so if you are having doubts about it the reflection and understanding of its workings will help you rest in God.

The beauty is that God makes His plans clear when we seek to know about Him, His will and what He has done in our lives.

When you look at the process of salvation you gain a grand appreciation of not only your salvation but of God Himself. To put it another way, you only understand just how much you are loved when you understand how much someone else loves you and no one loves you as much as God. In fact His love is an eternal love, it is out of love that He draws us to Him for salvation in the first place.

Jeremiah 31:3 (KJV)

3) The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

God's love is everlasting, it existed even before you were born. Additionally, it exists forever after you are saved for it is lasting for all time and it is His love for you that compels God to draw you to Him in the first place.

You see God exists out of time as do His attributes such as His love for you. We will look more into this later but reader know that you have been loved since even before you were born and that this is what moves God to draw you to Him and to save you.

Sometimes however this can be difficult to not just comprehend but to *accept*. Feeling as if you are too bad or too far gone or being unable to understand how you can be loved this much can keep people from God and can also cause Christians to doubt their salvation. Reader, know that God's love is eternal, that He seeks you and most importantly not just you but all men...

John 12:32 (KJV)

32) And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

Jesus spoke these words to His disciples describing to them the reasons for why He had to die. You see Jesus was God's way by which *all* could come to be saved. He is the key and is the way, the truth and the life as we have seen in other sermons.

Jesus draws all men to Him, salvation is fully impartial in that it is for all.

Therefore do not let feelings of inadequacy or guilt stop you from accepting His gift of salvation or from resting in it for salvation does not discriminate. He saved you because He wanted to, because He loves you!

John 3:16-17 (KJV)

16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17) For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

This is the gospel distilled to its purest message, God sent His only Son Jesus to die for you for only He could pay for your sins. For God so loved the world...there is no one left out of His love or from His offer of salvation.

Now not all will come to be saved, many will reject Jesus, but the condition is there that if someone is drawn to God and responds then salvation is there for them ready and waiting.

Salvation is an intentional process by God because of His love for us. This is why He draws all men to Him. It is an active process. How though does God draw us to Him?

Revelation 3:20 (KJV)

20) Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Drawing can be manifested in the form of God knocking at your hearts door. Think about this in terms of your personal life, when someone knocks at your house's door your curiosity is piqued.

The longer and more they knock the more you cannot deny the visitor's presence and the more curious you become. Still, it can be scary to answer the door, but notice that when you answer God that He will come in to you and eat with you, He will fellowship with you. He has not come to condemn you but to rescue you from condemnation. He has come to save you!

Reader when you were saved God came to you and you heard His voice and allowed Him to have fellowship with you for the very first time. What exactly does it mean to hear God's voice for salvation? How does hearing God's voice apply to salvation and faith?

Romans 10:17 (KJV)

17) So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Saving faith happens when we hear and respond to God's message, be it through the written word or through the gospel being preached by someone. Note that this someone does not have to be a preacher, it can be any Christian from a family member to a friend or even a stranger.

Every time the gospel is shared a seed is planted in your heart and a knock takes place at its door. This is because the gospel is not present without the Holy Spirit working and active in the sharing.

Sometimes the knock is so loud we know straight away that we need to answer it and we jump and open the door right away. That is the salvation of St. Paul.

Other times we are skeptical, scared or not ready, we need to know more, we are not convinced yet and that is ok. Also reader if you do not have a "radical" salvation testimony its ok, if it took you time that is ok too. Don't compare your salvation story with that of another, simply rejoice with them and that you are both now brothers or sisters in Christ. The gospel and salvation are radical in and of themselves, if your salvation testimony is simple be glad in that.

Now then faith comes by hearing. Simply put you have to have something to believe in, and what is more not something but someone (Jesus). You have to be presented with the gospel message. Think about it, who presented it to you? Maybe you read it on a tract, maybe a friend invited you to church, any number of things are possible but at some point you heard from God.

God uses all sorts of means and people to draw people to Him and He does it for good reason...

I Corinthians 2:14 (KJV)

14) But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Because our hearts are darkened and we cannot discern spiritual things on our own we need to hear from God and hear His message.

This is because we are fallen creatures and slaves to sin. It's the great infection of mankind and only God can provide the medicine to make us well and restore us to Him forever more.

People do not naturally seek after God, He has to initiate the process by which we will be saved. Yes people have desires for something such as finding the answer to the meaning of life and that is a good start, yet they must still hear of God and from God, they must be drawn to God by the Holy Spirit and that comes through His word and message be it by others, books or by preaching.

Reader it comes down to whatever the Holy Spirit uses to cause you to realize your need for Jesus as your savior and that you must believe in Him for salvation. Whatever or whomever it is that God uses to speak to you is what He uses to draw you to Him for salvation.

John 6:65 (KJV)

65) And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

Being given unto Jesus by God means that we cannot come to Jesus for salvation unless enabled to by the Holy Spirit. Wherever the gospel message is then the Spirit is there and enables us.

What is paramount to understand is that your salvation reader was an active and intentional process. We have seen that God knows us before we are born. We have seen that salvation is for the world (all men) and that God desires that all would come to be saved because He loves us with an everlasting love. We have seen that He draws us to Him through His word and gospel.

This only serves to underscore the fact that salvation is all of grace and not of any human effort except the response of accepting His gift of salvation.

While it is up to the individual to respond to God's gift of salvation it is truly wonderful to know that the road to us getting saved was planned and motivated by God. This let's us rest in Him and know that salvation is not something to blindly believe in and that it is something resulting not in our power but by Gods power. It takes the pressure off.

That is true faith reader, it is not blind faith for God tells us all about the process of salvation in His word. This process gives substance to our faith, we have not just God to believe in but His love for us, His drawing us towards Him, the death of His son for us on the cross for us and His active involvement in our lives.

God could have easily said just believe and trust me and left it at that, but He includes all these magnificent details in scripture for us to give us an appreciation, love and confidence in Him. He gives us these things for clarity and so we can understand Him.

Ultimately Christianity is reasonable, it is not a fairy tale devoid of any logic, it is an intentionally acted out reality in our lives.

Why does God do all of this for us? Because He loves us? Absolutely! But there is more, it is because we are chosen by Him. That is the ultimate expression of His love.

Ephesians 1:3-6 (KJV)

3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4) According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6) To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

We see here again that God knew us before the foundation of the world. We see that salvation is according to the good pleasure of God's will. And we see that it is God's grace that gets all of the glory in salvation.

Now then some of this begs a lot of questions regarding free will vs. determinism. I want to put that to rest here. My view as God has revealed it to me is that God knows what we will choose and decide.

It is a perfect interplay of God's sovereignty and man's free will. We cannot understand all of salvation's complexities this side of heaven however what we can know is that salvation has a purpose and a process, and this process gives us something wonderfully tangible to believe in and have confidence in. God works, we respond.

Yes, not all will accept God but for those of us who have we are the fulfillment of His grand design for mankind and for us as individuals. Subsequently we can say with cheerful reverence and joy that we are His sheep and that He knows us.

John 10:27-28 (KJV)

27) My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28) And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

Reader if you are saved you have heard God's voice and responded, God knows you and you follow Him.

They key then in the matter of assurance of salvation is to focus on the following. You know you have heard God's voice and you know that He knows you, but make sure you follow Him. How do you do this? Accept Him and His plans for you. Accept what He has given you...

Luke 12:32 (KJV)

32) Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Reader lay aside all wrestling with assurance of your salvation. Fear not and replace fears and doubts with the simple fact at face value that God your father, your shepherd, the one who drew you to Him, the one who saved you did all of it out of His good pleasure to give you the kingdom and eternal life. All you must do now is enjoy Him forevermore!

As we conclude this series I hope it has been a great help to you. Salvation is a truly supernatural and amazing thing. There is so much to take in and to appreciate about it. May we always praise God and spread His message to the ends of the earth. Amen!

When it comes to the Bible and Jesus there is always *Something To Write About!*

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