

STRENGTHENING THE FAITH OF THE DOUBTING BELIEVER

WEEK 6: HOW CAN WE CULTIVATE ASSURANCE OF OUR SALVATION?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The goal of this six-week class is to dive into our practical salvation. We want to know what the *real* Christian life looks like on the ground when we face times of doubt.
- We all face times of trial and suffering. We all do things that we know we should not have done. We all don't always *feel* like we are saved every moment of every day.
- What do we do with all of this and how can we keep going in times that we may just want to give up?
- **The Question:** Are you going to cling to your questions and doubt or are you going to cling to God and His promises?
- **Our schedule will look like this:**
 - Week 1: What is doubt? Is it opposed to faith? What does the Bible say about doubt?
 - Week 2: What is the root of doubt in the believer's life? How does Satan use doubt?
 - Week 3: What are the ramifications of doubt in the believer's life? How does it affect me?
 - Week 4: What do we need to know in times of doubt? Part 1 (look at biblical texts)
 - Week 5: What do we need to know in times of doubt? Part 2 (look at biblical texts)
 - **Week 6: How can we cultivate assurance of our salvation in our daily life?**

INTRODUCTION

- Over the past five weeks, we have taken time to examine doubt in the life of a believer.
 - This is a temptation that every believer struggles with (1 Cor 10:13), and it is one that can have severe ramifications in the life of a believer.
- Because of that, this week, we want to finish off this class with looking at the antithesis of doubt in the life of a believer and your greatest weapon against it: assurance.
 - What is "assurance"? How can you and I have assurance in our salvation? Why does this matter?
- I pray that this will serve as an encouragement to you as we come before God's word together.

PRESERVATION, PERSEVERANCE, AND ASSURANCE

- As we begin, it would be helpful to define some terms.
 - As we think through this topic of assurance, we need to distinguish it from other terms that you may have heard of in this line of thinking, namely, **preservation** and **perseverance**.
- This is important, because the underlying questions that begin to feed into our doubt of salvation are 1) “How can I know that I’m saved?”, and 2) “Can a believer lose their salvation?”
 - This is where these terms, when understood correctly, can rightly inform our thinking, or, when misunderstood, can begin to create confusion and doubt.

Preservation

- Preservation, often referred to as the “Eternal Security” of a believer, refers to God’s work in securing and guaranteeing the salvation of all true believers.
- When speaking of the preservation of believers, this is not something to cultivate or pursue, rather, this is an objective reality for all who are in Christ.
 - This is objective because it is a completed work of the Godhead.
 - “The Trinity secures us forever so that no Christian who believes in the Lord will ever be lost. Scripture bases the eternal security of the believer on the promises and power of God, the prayers of Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit.”¹
- All those in Christ WILL be preserved through the power of God.
 - **1 Thess 5:23-24** – *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.*
 - **1 Pet 1:4-5** – *...to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

Perseverance

- While preservation is the promise and work of God in securing the salvation of all whom He has chosen, perseverance is the call to the believer to endure, by faith, in this life to the end.

¹ John MacArthur, *Saved Without a Doubt: Being Sure of Your Salvation* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2011), 169.

- “From the human side, believers must apply the spiritual resources to maintain their relationship with Christ.”²
 - While this term can often be mixed into the concept of assurance of salvation, this is more closely linked to the preservation/eternal security of a believer in that it, also, is an objective reality.
 - More specifically, all who are preserved by God will persevere to the end.
- Yet, there is some tension in this, because, at the same time, this is something that believers are instructed to do!
 - **Col 1:21-23** – *And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard...*
- It can be said that perseverance is the fruit of preservation.
 - “The perseverance of the saints is the human response to the predestining work of God. You reveal you are kept by God if you don’t abandon the faith in the midst of a trial.”³

Assurance

- While the Preservation and Perseverance of a believer are objective realities of the Christian life (those who are saved will be preserved by God and, therefore, will persevere to the end), assurance is much more subjective in nature.
 - Assurance is “the internal sense we may have based upon certain evidences in our lives that we are truly ‘born again’ and will persevere as Christians until the end of our lives.”⁴
 - Assurance, then, is a humble and joyful confidence that we can have, based on unchanging spiritual realities, that we are saved.
- Because of this, the believer is called to cultivate assurance:
 - **2 Pet 1:10** – *Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble...*
 - **1 John 1:13** – *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.*
- Understanding, then, that assurance is to be cultivated, the question we want to answer is, “how does a believer practically cultivate assurance?”.

² Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 448.

³ MacArthur, *Saved Without a Doubt: Being Sure of Your Salvation*, 173.

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 1236.

THE MEANS OF CULTIVATING ASSURANCE

- Because there is instruction on putting off doubt and putting on assurance in the life of a believer, we must consider how we do this, practically, in our daily life.

Dwell on Gospel Realities

- The primary means by which believers can cultivate assurance is not so much in something they do, but rather, in remembering and dwelling on what has been done to them and for them in Christ.
- We never want to “move past” the gospel. It should not just be seen as the first step in the life of a Christian, but encompasses the whole life of the Christian.
- With this, we must remember that:
 - Salvation is a work of the Father!
 - His purposes are certain (Rom 8:28-30), and what He has begun in the life of a believer, He will perfect it (Phil 1:6)
 - His love is certain (Eph 2:4-9), and all who come to Him through faith in Christ will never be separated from that love (Rom 8:35-39)
 - His power to preserve those whom He has chosen is certain (John 10:29; 1 Pet 1:5)
 - Salvation is a work of the Son!
 - Through Christ’s penal substitutionary death, there is no condemnation for those who have placed their faith and trust in Him (John 3:16; Rom 8:1; Heb 10:14). Rather, we are forgiven and justified (Eph 1:7; Phil 3:9), reconciled to God (Col 1:19-22), brought to life spiritually (Eph 2:4-9)!
 - Through Christ’s resurrection, we can have victory over death and a hope in a heavenly inheritance (1 Cor 15:58; 1 Pet 1:3-5).
 - Through Christ’s intercession, we have an Advocate with the Father (Heb 7:25; 1 John 2:1)
 - Salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit!
 - The Spirit dwells in every believer, acting as a Helper to us (John 14:16)
 - The Spirit is a seal of God’s promise to us (Eph 1:13)
 - The Spirit empowers us in our sanctification (Gal 5:16-24)
- When we are tempted to doubt our assurance, we must remember the spiritual blessings that are ours in the gospel and the extent and abundance of the grace of God in the life of a believer.
 - **John 11:25-26** – *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”*

- When we lose sight of the gospel, and when we aren't rooting ourselves in the promises and character of God, we can begin to question our salvation or if, perhaps, we have lost our salvation.
 - However, the question is not "Can a believer lose their salvation?", but rather, "Can God lose those whom He has chosen?"
 - To this, we would answer, "**Absolutely not!**" (John 10:29)
- "Assurance is built on the historical reality of what Jesus Christ accomplished. It is not a feeling without reason, and you will never have the subjective feeling of assurance until you comprehend the objective truth of the gospel."⁵
- This step is also a helpful safeguard against false-assurance
 - While questions of doubt regarding salvation can be a temptation, there is a precedence laid out in Scripture to test our faith to see if it's genuine.
 - **2 Cor 13:5** - *Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?*
 - While we want to use this time to provide encouragement for doubting believers, it is helpful to remember that coming before God's word and examining the truths of salvation and our lives as those who profess Christ, there is also a safeguard in this that can prevent false assurance.
 - We must examine our hearts and our lives, holding them up to the truths of God's word.
 - It is not what we do that ensures our salvation, but rather, it is what Christ has done.
 - Have you placed your faith and trust in Him and His finished work on the cross as the basis for your salvation? Have you submitted to Him as Lord? (Rom 10:9)
- However, thinking of other means of cultivating assurance, there are ways believers can be fortifying their faith, through the word of God, that bring encouragement and assurance of salvation in Christ.

Take Your Thoughts Captive

- Given what we spoke of regarding the objective realities of the preservation and perseverance of believers, as well as the subjective nature of assurance, we need to make sure that we are not allowing how we *feel* to inform what we *know*.
 - Put another way, don't allow the subjective to define the objective.
- **2 Corinthians 10:5** – *...and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ...*
 - Practically speaking, we need to take those thoughts of doubt that plague us, reign them in, and filter them through the truth of God's word.

⁵ MacArthur, *Saved Without a Doubt: Being Sure of Your Salvation*, 113.

- What is it that is causing you to doubt?
 - Is there sin in your life that you need to confess/repent? Remember that God is faithful and just to forgive sin when we come to Him in repentance (1 John 1:8-10)
 - Are you struggling with temptation and wonder, “Would a believer really struggle like this?”? Remember, believers will struggle with sin their whole life, and there is no expectation of perfection (1 John 1:8-10), but rather, progression (2 Pet 1:5-9).
 - Are you struggling with a trial and are tempted to lose hope, or to think that God is punishing you? Remember, there is no condemnation for those in Christ and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom 8:1, 35-39).
 - Trials are the crucible in which assurance is formed. (Rom 5:3-5; James 1:2-4)
- This is why God’s word calls us so often to **remember** the truths of God’s character and His promises.
 - We must stop asking ourselves, “How does this make me feel?”, and ask instead, “Is it true?”.

Devote Yourselves to Time in the Word/Prayer

- There really cannot be growth in the area of assurance, or any area of the Christian life, apart from the word and prayer.
 - As we’ve spoken of the need to dwell on the realities of the gospel and a believer’s salvation in Christ, as well as the need to be taking thoughts captive, it is all rooted in God’s word!
- If we are to grow in assurance, we must seek to be in God’s word habitually. Memorizing it (Ps 119:11), searching it (John 5:39), delighting in and meditating on it (Ps 1:2), treasuring it (Ps 19:10), and living it out (Ps 119:1-2).
- How can this cultivate assurance?
 - It is evidence of the Spirit’s work in us, knowing that the natural man regards God’s word as foolishness and has neither the desire nor ability to comprehend spiritual truths (1 Cor 2:14-16).
 - It is where we see the character and promises of God on full display! (2 Pet 1:2-3)
- As Spurgeon said, “Backsliders begin with dusty Bibles and end with filthy garments.”
- Not only that, but we must also continually come to the Lord in prayer. Why?
 - It is an evidence of our Great High Priest’s work on our behalf (Heb 4:14-16)
 - It is through prayer that we can cast off anxieties, resulting in the peace of God which is beyond all comprehension (Phil 4:6-7).
 - By the way, this is also paired with dwelling on and practicing truth, which results in the God of peace being with us (Phil 4:8-9).

- “You can do more than pray, after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.” (John Bunyan)

Pursue Holiness, Reject Worldliness

- One of the greatest evidences of salvation in someone is what they are pursuing.
 - The natural man, being dead in their trespasses and sins, follows the ways of the world, the devil, and the flesh (Eph 2:1-3).
 - However, because of our salvation in Christ, we are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), we have a regenerated heart (Eph 2:4-9), and this all results in a complete transformation of the believers life.
- In Christ, we are sanctified, set apart from the world, though we still live in the world.
 - **1 Cor 6:11** – *...such were some of you, but you were washed/sanctified/justified...*
 - **Eph 4:22** – *...in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self...*
 - **John 15:19** – *If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.*
- Though we were once children of wrath (Eph 1:3), we are now freed to live as obedient children of the Lord, seeking to be holy as He is holy (1 Pet 1:14-16).
- It is this pursuit, in the separation from the world, hatred of sin, and desire for godliness that can serve to bolster our assurance of salvation. Because these things do not describe the natural man!
 - “If God’s will has become your highest joy, and submission to His lordship your greatest delight, you are indeed a child of God—no matter how strong the pull of sin.”⁶

Remember That This is a Daily Battle

- Because assurance is subjective and rooted within us, we need to remember that cultivating assurance is not a one-time thing. It is something that we continually fortify all our life.
 - **Prov 4:23** - *Watch over your heart with all diligence. For from it flow the springs of life.*
 - **1 Thess 5:16-18** - *Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*
 - **2 Pet 1:5-10** - *Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;*
- It is this daily battle that keeps us humble and dependent on the Lord and His grace (2 Cor 12:9-10) and continually renewing our minds in the Scriptures (Rom 12:1-2; Eph 4:23) so that we do not forget the glories of our salvation in Christ (2 Pet 1:9).

⁶ MacArthur, *Saved Without a Doubt: Being Sure of Your Salvation*, 119.

THE BLESSINGS OF CULTIVATING ASSURANCE

- While cultivating assurance can be difficult at times, it is certainly a worthy pursuit.
 - In fact, Scripture details the many blessings that this pursuit can bring!

Assurance Fuels Our Worship

- As we cultivate assurance of our salvation, remembering the greatness of God and the joy of His promises to believers, it drives us to worship of our great God!
 - **Ps 95:1-2** – *O come, let us sing for joy to the LORD, Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.*
 - **Psalm 103:1-2** – *Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits;*
- When we doubt, we are looking inward and focusing on ourselves, but assurance produces a thankful heart that points us upward in gratitude and worship!

Assurance Produces Lasting Joy

- When we know that we are saved, regardless of what we experience in this world, we can have unwavering, lasting joy that draws us back to the protection and provision of God to His people.
 - **Ps 23:6** - *Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*
 - **1 Peter 1:3-6** – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. **In this you greatly rejoice**, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials...*

Assurance Produces Contentment

- When you know that you are saved, and that you are in Christ, it produces contentment that is not dependent on what you possess in this world.
 - **Phil 3:7-8** – *But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ...*

- This is why Paul could be content in any circumstance, because through Christ in Him (Phil 4:13), he has all that he needs.
 - **Phil 4:19** - *And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*
- The man who has nothing in this world, but has Christ, has everything, and the man who has everything in this world, but does not have Christ, has nothing.

Assurance Creates a Zeal for Obedience and Service

- When you know you're saved, and as that knowledge and joy fuels a heart of worship, you will, as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17) desire to live according to Scripture and to serve the Lord!
 - **Rom 12:1** - *Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*
 - **Titus 2:14** – *...who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*
 - **Eph 2:10** – *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

Assurance Gives Victory Against Temptation

- When you know you're saved, you can be assured that, as you are working out your salvation with fear and trembling, God is at work in you (Phil 2:12-13), perfecting the work that He began in you (Phil 1:6).
- We can trust that the Lord is with us, even in times of temptation:
 - **1 Cor 10:13** - *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and **God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.***

Assurance Removes the Fear of Death

- Finally, when you know you're saved, you do not have to fear what comes after this life, knowing that you will never experience the wrath of God, because it was taken in full on the cross.
 - **Col 2:13-14** - *...“DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. “O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- Rather than fearing what comes after this life, we look ahead with longing, praying that Christ would come quickly!
 - **1 Pet 1:13** - *Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

FURTHER READING

- *Knowing and Growing in Assurance of Faith* by Joel Beeke
- *Saved Without a Doubt* by John MacArthur
- *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* by John Murray
- *The Cross and Salvation* by Bruce Demarest
- *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cure* by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones