

Free Grace and Assurance of Salvation

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Charles Haddon Spurgeon is quoted as saying that he was so sure of his salvation that he could grab on to a cornstalk and swing out over the fires of hell, look into the face of the devil, and sing, "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!"

All those who embrace free grace theology may not always agree on the exact interpretation of every Bible text, but they will all agree and support with their exegesis of Bible texts, that the offer of God's grace is free and that the assurance of one's salvation is based upon a message of free grace. In the words of the disciples, "Freely ye have received, freely [we] give" (Matt. 10:8). In the words of the late Charles Ryrie, we can all agree that the offer of God's grace is "absolutely free!"

A believer's assurance of salvation grows out of an understanding and acceptance of free grace. If salvation is something that is truly free, then a believer in Christ can have assurance only when he comes to realize that he is "justified freely by his grace" (Rom. 3:24). Free! Everyone understands what a free meal means, but sadly, many misunderstand or misrepresent what the message of free salvation is through Jesus Christ. Then there is grace! Everyone understands what an act of kindness means, and yet, when it comes to salvation, many writers and speakers will either frontload or backload the Gospel with legalism (Matthew 19:16, Acts 15:1; Gal. 5:1). This distorts grace, or God's expression of unmerited kindness, as seen in the death of Jesus Christ and the believer's gracious standing before God in Christ (Rom. 5:1).

SCRIPTURAL assurance, which is rooted in free grace, is related to clearly revealed facts, and rests upon solid Biblical ground. First, there is the matter of the *penalty* that was paid (Rom. 6:23 with Gal. 3:13 and 1 Cor. 15:3). Jesus paying the penalty for our sins supports the message of free grace and assurance. Our salvation is not based upon the price that WE pay but the price that Jesus paid when He died on the cross. Second, there is the wonderful *promise* of eternal life that Jesus repeatedly gave (John 3:16; 6:47; 10:28; 1 John 5:11-12). The old saying is true, "Tarry at a promise and God will meet you there!" Third, assurance can be ours if we realize that God's saving grace is received into our life by expressing *personal* faith in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 3:26; Rom. 10:13). Lastly, there is the matter of our *position* in Christ which never changes (Eph. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:30; Romans

3:22; 8:34-39). Our practice in sanctification will vary or change but our salvation position in Christ is permanent.

SUBJECTIVE assurance, which is rooted in bondage and legalism, is related to man's own ideas, feelings, moods, and attitudes. It does not rest on a solid foundation but is comparable to a house that is built on sinking sand (Matt. 7:26). Subjective assurance is *based* upon human works or performance (Eph. 2:8-9), it involves *boasting* of man's goodness (Luke 18:21; Rom. 3:12, 23), *bargaining* with God over our salvation (Matt. 19:16), *blindly* comparing oneself with other sinners (Luke 18:11), and *believing* that Christian heritage, church affiliation, baptism, and other rituals will in some measure make us acceptable before God (John 1:13; Col. 2:8, Acts 4:12).

I have also discovered that some well-meaning people actually think they must *become* clean before God, by confessing all their known sins before they die, or else they will not be taken to Heaven. They base this on 1 John 1:9. However, we must remember that the confession of sin in 1 John 1:9 is for Christians – not the unsaved. Furthermore, confession of sin is the basis for restored fellowship WITH God – not salvation and justification BEFORE God (Rom. 5:1; 8:30, 33; Gal. 3:24. Titus 3:7). If our salvation is based upon confession of our sins, then how many sins must we confess in order to get into Heaven? What if you forget to confess one sin or don't know you did something wrong (Lev. 4:2; Numb. 15:24-27) and fail to confess an unknown sin before you die?

Here are some similar questions: How good must you be to get into Heaven and how bad must you be to go to hell? What level of discipleship assures you that you are saved and going to Heaven? How many good deeds must you perform to be sure of Heaven? What is the ratio of "good" versus "bad" things one must do to be lost and end up in hell? Who determines this ratio and sets the standard? What percentage of your life must you yield to God in order to be saved – 50, 60, 70, 80, 99 or 100%? How can salvation be free (Rom. 3:24; 8:32; Rev. 21:6; 22:17), if you must BECOME something or DO, PROMISE, and FOLLOW something, or PERFORM good works your entire life to keep it? If you can DO good things in order to go to Heaven, then why did Christ die on the cross? Since Jesus said "It is finished" (John 19:30), how can good works merit or maintain your salvation? How can Jesus be the ONLY way to Heaven (John 14:6), if you can DO something to get there? How

can Jesus be the Savior (John 4:42), if you don't allow Him ALONE to be your Savior? Is the Gospel really "good news" (1 Cor. 15:3-4), if in the end, it can't save you?

Let us remember that we cannot TRY and TRUST at the same time! There can be no assurance of salvation when an individual looks to himself. He must look only to Christ and His promise of eternal life. God declared long ago in Isaiah 45:22, "Look unto me and be ye saved." This, by the way, was the verse that was used in the conversion of Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon records it like this: "I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, 'Look!' what a charming word it seemed to me. Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away!" Blessed noonday truth. A simple look of faith in Christ, who is our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7), and one is immediately and forever saved from hell and justified in the presence of God, on the basis of Christ's finished work.

In conclusion, let's continue to be united and rest in the Biblical truth and expression that salvation is by GRACE alone, through FAITH alone, in CHRIST alone! This will result in our assurance of salvation. In the words of the beloved William Newell, "Mercy there was great and grace was free, pardon there was multiplied to me, there my burdened soul found liberty at Calvary!" I'm still singing it!