

Assurance of Salvation

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | December 5, 2008



My question is about one's assurance of salvation. Based on your model of salvation as opposed to the common or traditional view of salvation, as being a legal act, when can one be assured of salvation?

The common view says that a person is saved at the point where one, by faith accepts Jesus in his/her life. We call this justification by faith. At that same point one can then have the assurance of salvation, the thief on the cross is usually used as an evidence to support this view. The assurance of salvation is maintained thru the process of sanctification which begins and continues till Jesus comes provided the person remains in Christ or maintains a saving relationship with Jesus.

Your model seems to focus more on the healing of our terminal condition, restoring us to God's original design or way of living-the circle of love, which makes a lot of sense to me especially when one understands sin and the law in the same way as you do. Now based on your model when is salvation assured? Is there such thing as justification in your model?

Thank you for your weekly studies. It has helped me see God as a truly loving God who does not

inflict punishment on anyone.

Keep up the good work. JH, Australia

Thanks for such a great question and one that many people struggle with regardless of which “model” they hold.

In my model we have the “assurance” of salvation when we “trust” Jesus with our lives, that’s it. Once we trust Jesus, He, our great Heavenly Physician, will perfectly heal and restore us, thus our assurance is in Jesus, not in ourselves or our future. “This is life eternal that they might know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3). When we “know” God as Jesus revealed Him to be and trust Him, then we have confidence, faith, or trust in Jesus’ ability to “save” (salvage) us! Our assurance or confidence is in our Savior (just like the thief on the Cross) not in a legal payment.

Consider a terminal physical illness. If a physician has a remedy which will cure you 100%, what is the essential step necessary in order for you to have “assurance” you will be “saved?” Is it not trust in the physician? When you trust the physician, you will open yourself to his treatment, follow his prescription, and surrender yourself to his interventions and the outcome is assured. But if you don’t trust the physician, then you won’t let him treat you, you won’t follow his prescription, and you won’t get well.

Likewise with our eternal salvation. If we trust Jesus, then He will perfectly heal us. It is in this trust relationship with Christ that we find our assurance of salvation. At the moment we trust Him and turn our lives over to Him we have His assurance that He will save us. But if we refuse to trust Him and instead trust in a “legal payment” or trust in rituals, observances, or sacraments, then we have no assurance, for there is no remedy to sinfulness in such things. Only those who experience the renewing, regenerating, indwelling Spirit experience transformation of heart and mind – real healing, real salvation!

Now let’s go back and examine the traditional view you quite accurately described above. The word salvation comes from the root “salvo” from which we get “salve” as in a medicinal ointment or “salvage” as in restoring something broken to unbrokenness. This is what salvation actually is, the healing, restoring, regenerating process. A legal act cannot do this. But God, being gracious, loving, and understanding, stoops down to meet us where we are to bring us up to where He wants us to be. Therefore, God has, in times past, communicated in legal language to people who could comprehend nothing else. At Sinai, when God wanted friendship and love, the only thing the people would hear was thunder and law, so God gave them what they could hear. Just as a parent gives parental “laws” to protect children who are too immature to understand the dangers of smoking or drugs, God gave ‘legal’ law to protect His immature children from destroying themselves long enough for them to grow up into trust and allow Him to heal them. Sadly, some never grow up.

In fact, some have misunderstood God and His use of law and created an entire legal framework for salvation. The “penal substitution” model of assurance is built upon distrust of God. In this traditional model, our assurance is in the “payment” made, because God is seen as a stern, severe, and “just” being who requires appeasement in whom we really don’t trust. Therefore, we need to be able to claim the “blood of Jesus” as our “legal right” to salvation and have Christ “plead” His blood to the Father in our behalf. Such a model, in which salvation is thought to be a legal payment made by one member of the

Godhead to satisfy the law or the Father, is an outgrowth of paganism in which angry and wrathful deities are assuaged by “payments” in order to grant “forgiveness.” Sadly, Christianity has succumbed to this pagan thought infection and too often teaches a pagan view of God and the atonement.

Justification means being “set right” or “put right.” Have you ever “justified” the margins on a document? If you have a word processor on your computer there is a command that allows you to “justify” the margins. When you execute this command what happens? Do you “legally pardon” your margins? Or do you put your margins in order, put what is out of harmony into harmony, set the margins straight or right?

When man sinned, what changed that needed to be set right? Did God somehow get changed and now Christ needed to die and minister His blood to the Father to set the Father right? Or did mankind get changed and Christ needed to come in order to set mankind right with God again? When God “justifies” us, He is setting us “right” with Himself. He is “rightifying” us! (Romans 8:31-34). This justification of the human race happened in the person of Jesus Christ, who, being fully human, being part of this race, having taken our humanity upon His divinity, lived a perfect life of love and destroyed the infection of sin, thus “rightifying” the species. He recreated, restored, healed, cleansed, set right, justified, and purified the human species in His own victorious life, death, and resurrection! It is in the Godman Jesus that the human race (species) was healed, set right, renewed, justified, rightified, and put back into God’s original ideal!

When we as individuals recognize all that Jesus revealed about the Father and are won to trust we open the heart and then we, as individuals, are “set right” or “justified” in our individual relationship with God. We then receive, via the work of the Holy Spirit, the transfusion of Christlikeness! The Holy Spirit takes what Christ achieved and reproduces it in us! His victory over evil, His perfect character of righteousness, His character of love, is downloaded into our hearts and we become like Him. Our thoughts are brought into harmony with His, our desires in union with His, our character renewed to be like His, our motives cleansed to be like His. We live a Christlike life, for it is no longer I, the sinful, selfish me living, but Christ, the lover of others who lives in me! Only in Jesus is this possible. Only in a trust relationship with Him can we ever be justified or set right, because only in Jesus can we know the truth about God, which wins us to trust and then, in that trust relationship, experience the transfusion of His character of love which restores us to His original ideal!

Blessings All until next week!