

ASSURANCE OF JUSTIFICATION

1. **Many who are in some way connected with Christianity are unsure of their eternal destiny, that is, their justification.**
 - a. This is for several reasons:
 - (1) They may have been poorly taught about the difference between justification and sanctification.
 - (2) They may still believe that faith alone in Jesus alone is not enough.
 - (3) They may not emotionally feel they are justified.
 - (4) They may question whether they are good enough to get to heaven.
 - b. The cure for uncertainty is justification by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone today.
 - c. Then the person must rely on the promises of God in Scripture.
 - d. Truly justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone. Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life. Period. End of discussion. There is nothing to add to faith alone in Jesus alone. Faith is the only requirement.
 - (1) **Jn 3:16** 16 God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
2. **Assurance is the believer's personal confidence of his own justification before God.**
 - a. Assurance occurs in phase two and is based upon phase one.
 - b. Assurance gives us confidence phase three will indeed happen for us.
 - c. How do we know we have believed in Jesus and are truly justified before God? What factors should we consider?
3. **Assurance of justification is not the same as eternal security.**
 - a. "[A]ssurance is a confidence that right relations exist between one's self and God. In this respect it is not to be confused with the doctrine of eternal security. The latter is a fact due to God's faithfulness whether realized by the believer or not, while the former is that which one *believes* to be true respecting himself at a given time."¹
 - b. One may be eternally secure without being experientially assured of it.
 - c. One may have little to no assurance of salvation and still have eternal security.
 - d. Our eternal security does not depend on our assurance.
 - e. All believers are eternally secure whether they are experientially assured of it or not.
 - f. That assurance is possible means that eternal security is a true doctrine.
4. **Doctrines that closely relate to assurance of justification are:**
 - a. *Grace Alone, Faith Alone, and Jesus alone.*
 - b. *Eternal Security.*
 - c. *The Three Phases of Salvation.*
 - d. Key doctrinal principles at the outset are:
 - (1) Justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone.
 - (2) Justification is a transaction. Sanctification is a process.
 - (3) Justification happens in a moment of time. Sanctification takes a lifetime.

¹ L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 7:21.

- (a) In a moment of time, the believer passes from positional death to positional life. There is no going back to positional death.
- (b) **Jn 5:24** 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.
- (4) A believer who generally fails in sanctification is still justified.
- (5) Assurance of of justification does not equal assurance of sanctification.

5. Only in the biblical worldview is assurance of salvation is possible.

- a. Any worldview that ultimately depends on man can offer no assurance of salvation. This is because we can never be sure what we, as people, will do, whether good or evil. We may do good today, but that is no guarantee we will do good tomorrow.
- b. Our assurance is based totally upon the finished work of another, Jesus, and has nothing to do with what we do or don't do. Therefore, once we are in him, that is, in the Lord Jesus, we know that all the work concerning our justification is complete. There is nothing left for us to do. It's a done deal. Our salvation is not based in the present or future, but upon the past.
- c. For example, a Muslim can never be certain of his eternal salvation because he can never be sure how well his good works stack up against his bad works.
- d. Likewise, a Roman Catholic can never be certain of his eternal salvation because to him, salvation is based not only upon the person and work of Jesus but also his own good works. Justification is a process of pursuing righteousness throughout one's life, not a one-time event that occurs at the moment of faith in Jesus.
- e. Only the biblical worldview offers an individual a permanent and lasting basis upon which to base future hope. That basis is the finished work of Jesus, that is his substitutionary death on the cross, and his bodily resurrection from the dead.
- f. If justification depends on us in any way, we can never be sure. If it depends on solely on God, we can be 100% certain.
- g. Assurance of justification is possible in this life, and only the Christian may have it.

6. God wants us to be sure of our justification.

- a. **1 Jn 5:13** 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know (οἶδα) that you have eternal life.
- b. Like Job, we may know that the Redeemer lives, and that he is *our* Redeemer.
 - (1) **Job 19:25** 25 I [Job] know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
- c. Assurance that phase one has taken place is the entire basis of phase two.
 - (1) One can't succeed in phase two unless he is certain phase one has taken place.
- d. Jesus wants us to know he will raise every believer on the last day.
 - (1) **Jn 6:37-40** 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my own desire but the desire of him who sent me. 39 And this is the desire of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the desire of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

- e. It is the privilege of believers to know for sure that they are not condemned.
 - (1) **Ro 8:1** 1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Jesus.
 - (2) **Jn 3:18** 18 Whoever believes in [the Son] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
- f. Paul struggles in order that the Colossian and Laodicean believers will reach the riches of certainty, including certainty of their own personal justification before God.
 - (1) **Col 2:1-3** 1 I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you, for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of certainty (πληροφορία) of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery.
- g. John writes his gospel for the purpose that his readers might know how to have life.
 - (1) **Jn 20:31** 31 These [things] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.
- h. It is important for our mental health to know for sure we are justified.

7. Assurance is based upon who and what God is, not who and what we are.

- a. It is the object of our faith that counts, not the amount of our faith.
 - (1) See *Phase One Faith*.
- b. Assurance strengthens when we take our eyes off our unfinished work and place them on Jesus' finished work.
- c. We must develop a deep understanding that justification is truly by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus' person and work alone. That doctrine, applied to us personally, is the source of our assurance.

8. God's word is the primary source of our assurance.

- a. God is immutable, faithful, and true. He never lies or misleads us.
 - (1) See *The Immutability of God*, *The Faithfulness of God*, and *The Truth of God*.
- b. The doctrine of eternal security is the foundation of the doctrine of assurance.
 - (1) See *Eternal Security* and *Identity in Jesus*.
- c. Jesus promises rest to those who come to him in faith. This isn't a false promise.
 - (1) **Mt 11:28** 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
- d. Jesus is under orders never to lose anyone who comes to him in faith.
 - (1) **Jn 6:37-40** 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my own desire but the desire of him who sent me. 39 And this is the desire of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the desire of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.
- e. Believers cannot be snatched out of Jesus' hand, nor out of the Father's hand.
 - (1) **Jn 10:28-29** 28 I give [my sheep] eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

- f. For those who are positionally in Jesus through faith, there is no condemnation.
 - (1) **Ro 8:1** 1 There is...now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Jesus.
- g. “We believe it is the privilege, not only of some, but of all who are born again by the Spirit through faith in Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, to be assured of their salvation from the very day they take Him to be their Savior and that this assurance is not founded upon any fancied discovery of their own worthiness or fitness, but wholly upon the testimony of God in His written Word, exciting within His children filial love, gratitude, and obedience (Luke 10:20; 22:32; 2 Cor. 5:1, 6-8; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 10:22; 1 John 5:13).”²

9. Our Christian experience is the secondary source of our assurance.

- a. Many of us have a definite, point-in-time experience of faith in Jesus we can point to.
 - (1) **Ac 16:29-33** 29 The [Philippian] jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. And he was baptized at once, he and all his family.
 - (2) The definite, point-in-time experience:
 - (a) Could be in private or public.
 - (b) Could be dramatic and spectacular or mundane and matter-of-fact.
 - (c) Could involve some sort of vision or supernatural experience or not.
 - (d) Could involve release from demonic possession or influence or not.
 - (e) Could involve raising one’s hand or walking an aisle at a church or Christian camp.
 - (f) Could involve praying with someone or praying alone.
 - (g) Could be at a high point or low point in one’s life.
 - (h) Could happen for a three-year old or one’s death bed.
 - (3) However, some may not recall a point-in-time experience.
 - (a) This is particularly true for those who grow up in a Christian home and have always just believed in God and Jesus.
 - (b) We don’t have to recall a point-in-time experience to have assurance.
 - (4) Statistics say the point-in-time experience for most Christians comes before age 18. But this is not always the case!
 - (5) At this point, one’s theological understanding often is not great, but that is of little consequence. The primary consideration is humility before God and simple faith in the basic gospel message centered on Jesus’ person and finished work.
 - (6) The point-in-time faith decision happens differently for each individual believer.
 - (7) But the common denominators are:
 - (a) The conviction, illumination, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.
 - (b) Personal faith in the person and work of Jesus.
- b. Often this point-in-time experience is solidified through water baptism.

² Dallas Theological Seminary.

- (1) Solidifying one's faith in and identification with Jesus is a key function of water baptism.
 - (a) **Acts 2:41** 41 Those who received [Peter's] word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.
 - (b) **Ac 8:12-13** 12 When [the Samaritans] believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Messiah, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip.
 - (c) **Ac 16:33** 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. And he was baptized at once, he and all his family.
- (2) See *Water Baptism*.
- c. Ongoing participation in the Lord's supper also confirms one's faith in Jesus.
 - (1) See *The Lord's Supper*.
 - (2) Notice all three experience so far are grace activities. Faith in Jesus, water baptism, and participating in the Lord's supper are actions virally every human being is able to perform. Truly justification is a grace gift to be accepted through faith.
- d. We experientially know we have received the Father's testimony concerning his Son.
 - (1) **1 Jn 5:9-10** 9 If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. 10 Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. 11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know (οἶδα) that you have eternal life.
- e. We have consciousness that God has forgiven our sins.
 - (1) **Hebrews 10:1-2** 1 Because the [Mosaic] law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins?
 - (2) Jesus does not have to keep being sacrificed, because all our sins, past, present, and future, have already been paid for by him.
- f. Our conquering of personal sins assures us we are believers.
 - (1) **1 Jn 3:9** 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.
- g. Our advance in Christian qualities
 - (1) **2 Pe 1:10-11** 10 Brothers and sisters, be all the more diligent to validate (βέβαιος)³ your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities [faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, patient endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love] you will never fall.
- h. Our good works, done by the power of the Holy Spirit, assure us we are believers.

³ “[P]ert. to having validity over a period of time, *in force*, *valid* of a promise that applies to all pers” (BDAG, 172).

- (1) **1 Jn 3:10** 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God.
- i. We experience love for our Christian brothers and sisters across the street and around the world.
 - (1) **1 Jn 3:10** 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.
 - (2) **1 Jn 3:14** 14 We know (οἶδα, perf.) that we have passed (μεταβαίνω, perf. act.) out of [positional] death into [positional] life, because we love (ἀγαπάω, pres.) the brothers and sisters. Whoever does not love (ἀγαπάω, pres.) abides (μένω, pres.) in death.
- j. We experience God's love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.
 - (1) **Ro 5:5** 5 Hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.
- k. The Spirit testifies with our human spirits that we are children of God.
 - (1) **Ro 8:15-17** 15 You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father! 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Messiah, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
 - (2) “This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God; which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.”⁴
- l. We happily cry out to God the Father, Abba! Father!
 - (1) **Ro 8:15-17** 15 You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father!

10. The benefits of assurance are:

- a. We have a basis for permanent joy.
 - (1) **Lk 10:20** 20 Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven [that phase one has happened and that phase three will happen].
- b. We know what our ultimate end will be.
 - (1) **Jn 6:39-40** 39 This is the desire of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the desire of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.
 - (2) **2 Co 5:1** 1 We know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.
- c. We know we are foreknown, predetermined, called, and justified.

⁴ Westminster Confession.

- (1) **Ro 8:29-30** 29 Those whom [God] foreknew he also predetermined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predetermined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.
- d. We know God is for us in every circumstance.
 - (1) **Ro 8:31** 31 If (εἰ) God is for us [believers][and he is], who can be against us?
- e. We know we may approach God with our requests.
 - (1) **He 10:22** 22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance/certainty (πληροφορία)⁵ of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

11. Assurance of phase one justification is essential for phase two sanctification.

- a. We must know we have received Jesus before we can walk in him.
 - (1) **Col 2:6** 6 As you received Messiah Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.
- b. To consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God, we must know for sure we are in Jesus.
 - (1) **Ro 6:11-12** 11 You [believers]...must keep considering (λογίζομαι, pres.) yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Messiah Jesus [because phase one has happened].
- c. We must be certain of our new identity in Jesus in order to live the Christian life.
 - (1) See *Identity in Jesus*.

12. Assurance of our own justification differs from assurance of another's justification.

- a. If a persons tells you they believe in Jesus, assume they are telling the truth, unless you have very good reason to think otherwise.
- b. If a believer is living a fleshly life, warn them of divine discipline.
- c. If an unbeliever is living a fleshly life (and all must), warn them of the wrath to come and judgment in the lake of fire.
- d. If you're unsure whether a person is a believer or unbeliever, warn him both of divine discipline and eternal judgment.

13. Verses that are not talking about assurance of phase one justification are:

- a. **2 Co 13:5-8** 5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith [operationally]. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Messiah is in you [operationally]?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! 6 I hope you will find out that we have not failed the [operational] test.
 - (1) “For questions of eternal salvation, look to the author and finisher of your faith. For questions of growth in maturity, examine yourselves.”⁶
- b. **1 Jn 2:3-6** 3 By this we continue to know (γινώσκω, pres.) that we have known (γινώσκω, perf.) him, if (εάν) we keep on keeping (τηρέω, pres. subj.) his commandments. 4 Whoever says, I have come to know (γινώσκω, perf.) him, but is not keeping (τηρέω, pres.) his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever is keeping (τηρέω, pres.) his word, in him truly the love of God has been

⁵ “[S]tate of complete certainty, full assurance, certainty” (BDAG, 827).

⁶ N. Holsteen, Dallas Theological Seminary.

matured (τελειόω, perf. pass.). By this we continue to know (γινώσκω, pres.) that we are in [fellowship with] him: 6 whoever says he is abiding (μένω, pres.) in him ought to keep walking (περιπατέω, pres.) in the same way in which [Jesus] walked.

(1) The context of 1 Jn 2 is 1 Jn 1, in which phase two operational fellowship with God is at issue.

(a) **1 Jn 1:6** 6 If we say we have fellowship with [God] while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

c. Verses that talk about both phases one and two can be confusing.

(1) **1 Jn 5:1-5** 1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah has been born of God [phase one], and everyone who loves the Father [in phase two] loves whoever has been born of him [in phase one]. 2 By this we know [in phase two] that we love the children of God [all of whom have passed through phase one], when we love God and obey his commandments [in phase two]. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments [in phase two]. And his commandments are not burdensome. 4 For everyone who has been born of God [in phase one] overcomes the world [in phase two]. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our [phase one] faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes [in phase one] that Jesus is the Son of God?

(a) Faith in Jesus happens in phase one. Love for the Father and obedience to his commands happens in phase two.

(b) Love for the Father and obedience to his commands in phase two tends to verify one has believed in Jesus in phase one.

Music

Charles Wesley, “And Can It Be” (1738).

Frances Crosby, “Blessed Assurance” (1873).

James M. Black, “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder” (1893).

Frank M. Graham, “The Old Account Was Settled” (1902).

Bibliography

Chafer, Lewis S. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993. 7:21–24.

Notes