

## Inner Peace #8 The Problem of Spiritual Uncertainty

**Intro:** I remember her well. She seemed to me to be a natural worrier. It was as if her mind was always in high gear with pressing concerns and when she talked she almost couldn't seem to find a quitting place because of the thoughts that flooded her mind. Sometimes I would say, "Hello, Evelyn, how's it going. And for the next thirty minutes or so I'd stand nodding my head as her thoughts came pouring out as if they'd been pent up like water behind a dam. I studied the Bible with her husband and eventually baptized him; but in our studies she would often ask the same question, "Brother John, how do we know that we are doing enough?" Her concern was that when she faced God in judgment she would not be saved because she had not done enough for God. I would try to assure her that she was saved by God's grace; but I never could tell if she ever quite accepted that and consequently I'm not sure she ever felt real inner peace about her salvation.

Can you relate to that woman? Probably all of us can to some degree. If we are serious about serving the Lord, then we may surely ask those same questions and not possess inner peace about our relationship with God.

### Why fear and doubt creep in

*We compare ourselves to others and we think, "If someone else can do that, I ought to be able to do that". And so we feel inwardly condemned. Sometimes well intentioned preachers exacerbate our guilt and inadequacy by reminding us Sunday after Sunday about duties to God that we're not doing and areas where we need to grow more. And so we may go away with additional feelings of doubt and uncertainty and maybe even guilt (some legitimate and some illegitimate). Some of the uncertainty and fear is rooted in a mistaken notion of salvation. The world in general has a works-oriented concept of eternal salvation. Do more good than bad and you will go to heaven. And even in the church we don't entirely turn loose of the concept. We become convinced that the better we are, the better chance we have of going to heaven; and I used the word "chance" on purpose; for even then there is still a chance we won't make it. I've often heard people say about some departing brother or sister, if they don't go to heaven, nobody will. But what I sensed was that the hope of their salvation was based on the performance of the person rather than upon the relationship of that person with Jesus Christ.*

### Is it possible to have confidence in anticipation of the judgment?

*Consider these verses:*

*"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:27-28)*

*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)*

*For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. (2 Timothy 1:12) 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; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (2 Peter 1:10-11) These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)*

***Surely these verses should convince us that it is possible to face the judgment with confidence and hope; and there are many more.***

**On what basis can a disciple feel hope instead of fear?**

***It is not on the basis of the fact that he/she will successfully know and do all God has said all the time.***

*If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)*

***It is on the basis of the fact that the punishment that we deserve for our sins has already been paid by Jesus Christ. It is because you are a child of God who is loved by Him.***

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Romans 8:31-34)*

***It is because as God's child you walk in the light:***

*but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)*

***It is as if John knew the struggle we'd have in our hearts about our relationship to God and the judgment. Thus, he wrote:***

*Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. (1 John 3:18-20)*

**In “walking in the light” we are not earning points with God that make our salvation more certain, nor are we in raising the percentage of commands obeyed raising the probability of divine acceptance at the judgment. When are we going to get to the point in our faith, love, or obedience that we can say, “I’ve finally reach perfection”. How will anything less than 100% be enough to earn righteousness before God? How will anything less than 100% not lead to the need for God’s grace as the grounds of our acceptance?**

**In fact, it is the acknowledgement of our need for God's forgiveness that keeps us in fellowship with Him!**

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*

**By walking in the light we are living out the love and faith that we have in Jesus in understanding and appreciating His sacrifice for us. And in so doing our hope should be increasing daily.**

*"So our love for him grows more and more, filling us with complete confidence for the day when he shall judge all men--for we realize that our life in this world is actually his life lived in us." (1 Jn. 4:17, Phillips)*

**Living in hope rather than fear gives us vitality and energy for greater service.**

*How did Paul get the energy and passion to accomplish his great life's work? Was it because he believed that the more miles he traveled to preach the surer he could be of being accepted by God? Was it because he believed that the more rocks that hit him the more God would be obligated to save him? Here is his explanation:*

*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. (1 Corinthians 15:10)*

*The truth is the greater the love and grace of God looms in your heart the more you want to do for the Lord, not to gain acceptance, but to show thanks and love for the acceptance you've already gained!*

**Living in legalistic fear brings discouragement and self-righteousness.**

*Have you ever watched a football team just give up in the middle of the game? You just knew that they had lost not only their will to win but more important the hope of winning!*

*There is a spiritual version. Sometimes we are just overcome with our weaknesses and failures and shortcomings and viewing them from a legalistic perspective it just seems futile to keep trying. After all, we'll never measure up! Such wrong thinking leads to discouragement and defeat or its pigmy cousin of self-righteousness that sells short what could be become if we were energized by grace.*

*For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15)*

**Conclusion: Let your mind find peace in this truth: "There is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"! You and I are failing and faltering children of God. Our understanding of his word may not be perfect; our performance falls short of His expectations. By the law we would be doomed to eternal death; but by grace, because of His perfect life and sacrifice, we have hope.**