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Editor, Keith Sharp

Designer, William Stewart



- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

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Finally, brethren

WHATEVER THINGS

are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

"The true use of all history is to teach us lessons about God"

(Albert Barnes, **Notes on the Old Testament**, comment on Psalm 107:8)

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at christistheway.com.

Bulwarks of the Faith

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

There were bulwarks, towers of defense, on the walls of Jerusalem, that Israelites relied upon against their enemies. But the real strength of Zion was God Who dwelt within her walls (Psalm 48).

God dwells within His church as our strength as long as we maintain the divine pattern, the bulwarks of the faith (2 John 9; 2 Timothy 1:13). The doctrine of Christ, the only thing we teach, is a mighty bulwark (2 John 9-11) against false teaching (2 Peter 2:1-3). The holy lives of the Lord's saints is a strong defense against the world (1 Peter 1:15-16). Our worship, in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24), is an impregnable tower against will worship. The pattern of organization we must follow, the independent, self-governed congregation (Philippians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:1-2) is a bulwark against denominationalism. The spiritual work in which the church is to actively engage is a mighty tower against materialism (Romans 14:17; 1 Timothy 3:14-15). Its nonsectarian unity is a great bulwark (John 17:20-21; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13). Our one hope, a home in heaven, is the mighty tower against despair (1 Peter 1:3-5).

In the faithful, diligent maintenance and application of these bulwarks is the church's real strength. "Mark well her bulwarks."

1 John 3:8 and Repentance

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Those who teach a Christian is "automatically" forgiven of the sins they commit in ignorance or weakness, without actually having to "turn from" (Ezekiel 18:21) them, sometimes claim I John 3:8 is a verse that supports their doctrine. The part of the verse they are referring to reads, "He that committeth sin is of the devil." We are told this passage has under consideration the "practice" of sin, and that the "practice" of sin here would mean the committing of sin over and over again, and would not address the occurrence of a sin committed only on occasion. The argument is then made that a person who commits one or two sins occasionally is not practicing sin, in the sense of this passage, and is therefore not of the devil, but of God. In other words, a person can commit a sin and be automatically forgiven of it "even as he sins," as long as he only commits the sin "every now and then." Is this what I John 3:8 really teaches? Let's think for a moment and see.

First of all, this passage says nothing about sins committed in ignorance or weakness. Suddenly we have gone from teaching the automatic forgiveness of sins of ignorance and weakness, which are types of sins, to the automatic forgiveness of sins based upon the quantity of sins, regardless of the type. This is a sure sign of where this teaching has gone. If some are not satisfied with God's law that all sin condemns (Rom 6:23), but instead introduce certain types of sins that do not condemn, and then why not go on and say that really, any type of sin can be automatically forgiven as long as we don't commit the sin too often? Where will it stop, short of something only theoretically different from the "once saved always saved" doctrine?

Isn't it strange these preachers would use (misuse) this passage in an attempt to support their theory when, if it really meant what they said it meant, it would contradict their doctrine anyway? They say it means if a person commits an occasional sin, he is all right, but if a man "practices" sin, then he is of the devil. However, these same men teach that a man can actually "live" in sin (practice it), as long as those sins are committed in ignorance or in weakness. Sometimes they say it is the practice/amount of a sin, regardless of the type, that causes you to be lost, but then other times they say it is the type of sin (willful), regardless of the quantity, that makes the difference.

Even if John means the continual committing of sin by the phrase "committeth sin," it would not prove a person who commits only one sin is not "of the devil." The verse would only be addressing the man who commits sin over and over, it would not be addressing the question of whether or not a man who commits only one sin would be "of the devil." But this really isn't the point here anyway. The point of this passage does not rely upon defining "committeth" as a continual sinning (practice). I John 3:4 uses the same word "committeth," when it says, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law." Does this passage mean a person only transgresses the law when he continually commits sin (as opposed to committing only one sin)? Of course not, a man transgresses the law whenever he sins, even just one time. Likewise, John's point in 1 John 3:8 is that whenever a man sins, whether one time or many times, he is of the devil, he has taken the devil's side at least in that particular decision.

Some denominationalists use this verse along with I John 1:9a, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin," to assert it is impossible for a person who has been born again to commit a single sin. Some gospel preachers claim this is talking about the practice of sin, not the commission of sin on occasion. This really isn't an answer because we don't really believe it is impossible for a person that has been born again to go back and began again to practice sin. 1 John 3:8-9 is not saying it is impossible for a child of God to practice sin (a person who has been born again can choose to do so if he wishes); instead it is saying a child of God should not (it is inconsistent with being born of God) commit sin. He should not commit many sins, he should not commit even one sin.

The Bible certainly shows just one sin condemns. Ezekiel 3:20 teaches if a man, who has lived righteously all his life, commits even one sin, he will be lost. According to Acts 8:18-24, Simon the Sorcerer was condemned for only one sin. Galatians 2:11-18 shows the apostle Peter was condemned for only one sin. Is that the same as saying they were "of the devil?" They were until they repented of their sin; they were

following (of) the devil, not God, when they committed the sin, right? The Bible says in Matthew 12:30, "He that is not with me is against me." Every choice we make (in regard to sin) is either for God or for the devil, there is no middle ground. When a person sins he is acting as an instrument of the devil, not God.

The Bible clearly teaches in Matthew 16:21-23 that when a person commits even just one sin, he is "of the devil." In verse 22, Peter commits a sin, seemingly in "sincerity" or ignorance. He, from a human standpoint, shows his loyalty to the Lord (similar to Uzza in 1 Chronicles 13:7-10) by objecting to the forthcoming murder of Jesus. But however "sincere" Peter may have been, Jesus still condemns him for his statement by saying, "Get thee behind me Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." When Jesus called Peter Satan here, it is the same as saying he is "of the devil" (in the sense of 1 John 3:8). Certainly this case proves that "he that committeth sin (even one) is of the devil."

So 1 John 3:8 does not teach God is going to let a few "inadvertent" sins slip by unnoticed. To the contrary, the Bible teaches whenever a man commits a sin, he is "of the devil," he is following the devil instead of God (at least in that one act); he has chosen the devil's way instead of God's escape route (1 Corinthians 10:13); he has submitted to the devil. Any sin is serious to God, no matter how little it is, no matter what kind it is, no matter how many times it has been committed. In short, God hates every false way (Psalm 119:104), and so should we. And therefore we should repent to avoid perishing (2 Peter 3:9).

- So You Want to Be a Preacher -

Preaching Is Not a "One-man-show"

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

What is a preacher? He is a servant, not the master. He is not the ringmaster of the show. He is not the "be all, end all." He is just a humble servant, a sinner saved by the grace of God. Even the apostle Paul, as great as we think he was, did not have too high an opinion of himself. "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all" (1 Timothy 1:15).

If there is one thing I have been careful of in my life of preaching, it is that I did not want the church to be "my church." I am aware that there have been a few through the years who made such an accusation when things didn't go their way, but their assertions were disabused by the vast majority of the Christians who were part of the body.

Obviously, there are situations in smaller congregations where the preacher must play many roles. There have been occasions where I have led singing, served the Lord's Table, preached and prayed. Yet even in those situations, I did not set out to make arbitrary decisions. In beginning the work where I have been the past three-plus decades, we had about 12 members at the start. Besides myself, as I recall, there were four men—three young and one elderly. None had any experience in leadership roles, and in fact some were fairly new converts. But in making decisions about the work, we discussed things together.

In the absence of elders, the temptation may be stronger for the preacher to make arbitrary decisions. But this will never help men to develop leadership qualities, and lends itself to the "pastor" system that we see in so many denominations.

The large mega-churches that are growing are often cult-like in their focus on a charismatic preacher. These preachers get so full of themselves that they are setting themselves up for a huge fall. We have seen the headlines through the years—sexual immorality, financial shenanigans, dictator-style rule.

I consider myself an important part in the work of the congregation, but I am just one of many parts. In addition to being a preacher, I have also served as one of the elders. But I was not the "head elder." When we had congregational meetings to present plans to the church, or discuss certain matters of mutual

interest, I generally let one of the other elders make the presentation. When we had a meeting of the elders and deacons, I was usually not the “chairman.” Nor did I feel I was the only one capable of making announcements.

On occasion, we have a young man sharing the responsibilities of preaching and teaching. I don’t have to preach most of the time. In fact, we share equally when I am in town. But in addition to that, we work to develop the talents of others. Every third Sunday one of our young men preaches. The youngest has been 12 years old, and he did a very good job. Including all males who have the ability to preach, we have perhaps 20, out of a total membership of about 130.

We cannot depend on the schools to train our preachers. We must depend on local congregations, and that may mean that the local preacher must step aside from the pulpit from time to time to prepare our young men to fulfill this stewardship. This will also involve some study time with these young men to instill both knowledge and skills. A doctor must spend much time in preparing his knowledge and skills for his important role. And although it may not take six years to prepare a man to preach, it should be obvious that time is needed. And who better to do this teaching than one who is already experienced?
 (“For in fact the body is not one member but many.” - 1 Corinthians 12:14)

"Take Heed"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-10, the apostle Paul told of all the benefits provided the children of Israel by God and yet they still became sinful and were destroyed by Him. There are three words which stand out in this text, “all” “most” and “some.” “All” were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized unto Moses, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink (verses 1-3). Despite the effort put forth by God to deliver them, showing He was divine and in control, with “most” of them He was not pleased (verse 5). “Some” became idolaters, some committed sexual immorality, some tempted God, and some of them complained and were destroyed by the destroyer (verses 7-10).

These things are recorded for examples and admonition to all who would be followers of the Lord (verse 11). In the very next verse, a warning is sounded to those who are Christians, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (verse 12). There are several lessons for us in these verses.

One can become overconfident. It is the person who thinks he stands who must be the most cautious. As you read this text it may well have entered your mind, “I would have never done those things.” That may or may not be true. One will never know until put into similar circumstances faced by these people of God. Notice this comment:

“When one feels most confidence in himself, then there is the greatest danger that he will be presumptuous and commit the greatest sin. Poor in spirit, contrite and humble in heart are qualities that God loves in man” (Gospel Advocate Commentaries: First Corinthians. 158).

One of the greatest examples of one displaying such an attitude would be the apostle Peter. He told the Lord he would never be made to stumble, yet when faced with the temptation he did fall, denying the Lord on three occasions (Matthew 26:31-35; 69-75). It can happen to us just like it occurred to them.

One can fall. The word “fall” is defined as, “to fall from a state of uprightness, i.e. to sin” (Thayer. 511). A child of God can sin and separate himself from the grace and mercy of God (Isaiah 59:1-2). Over and over in the book of Hebrews this principle is set forth. The writer says, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). Many in the religious world teach if you have been saved you can never commit an act of sin which would cause you to be lost. Why the warnings if such was impossible? In Acts 8 we read of man name Simon, who had been a sorcerer (verse 9). Upon hearing the gospel message, he believed and was baptized (verse 13), saved by the grace of God. When Peter and John come to Samaria, they layed hands on the brethren to impart the Holy Spirit to them (giving of spiritual gifts). When Simon sees this, he wanted to buy this gift with money (verse

18). He was told by Peter to repent and pray so this sin would be forgiven him (verse 22). Here is a person who had been saved and then fell into sin. If he had refused to repent and pray, would he have been saved? No! We can fall from the grace of God (Galatians 5:4).

We must take heed. The definition of the word “heed” is, “to turn the thoughts or direct the mind to a thing, to consider, contemplate, look to” (Thayer. 103). What do I need to consider or to contemplate? That I can fall into sin, separating myself from God and lose my soul. What can I do to avoid this? When faced with the temptation to commit sin, I can seek the way of escape provided by the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Psalmist tells us to put the word of God in our hearts so that we might not sin against Jehovah (Psalm 119:11). Jesus tells us to pray to the Father that we are not led into temptation but delivered from the evil one (Matthew 6:13). Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God so we can stand and not fall when faced with all the wiles of Satan (Ephesians 6:11-18). We all know our own personal weaknesses. Whatever they might be, avoid the places or the people who might cause us to be tempted and fall (Proverbs 7:7-8).

May God give us the wisdom, the strength, the determination, and the humility of heart needed to stand firm in the faith and never fall.

The Cost of Adultery

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

God gives numerous warnings about the dangers of adultery. Among them, He says it is foolish and destructive (Proverbs 5:7-14) and permanently shameful. “Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonor he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away” (6:32-33). These are convincing reasons for every woman to be faithful to her husband and for every man to “always be enraptured with” the love of his wife (5:19).

Sexual desires are given to us by God, who specifically tells us to limit those passions to marriage.

“Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband” (1 Corinthians 7:2-3).

To use those desires with anyone else is considered adultery before God, whether it be of a physical nature or mental. Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

Mental adultery may not have the same earthly consequences as the actual act itself, like pregnancy, disease, or grounds for divorce, but lust in the heart is just as sinful and condemning before God as physical adultery. He wants us to remain sexually pure in both body and spirit.

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).

God says adultery comes with an expensive price tag. “He shall die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray” (Proverbs 5:23). One way or another it will cost us our “life,” which may include the loss of physical life, like an ox going to the slaughter or a bird getting caught in a snare (7:22-23). Or it may be the loss of life’s precious blessings: family, honor, and joy. Additionally, according to Jesus, if our spouse divorces us for our infidelity, we will not be permitted to remarry without committing adultery (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). This will usher in all kinds of painful challenges that few want to bear: the loss of companionship, the inability to see children on a daily basis, the loss of respect from family and friends, loneliness, and so forth. Adultery may even cost us our home, a job, our health, and future happiness. Then, to top it all, if we leave this life without repenting of it and receiving forgiveness, we will have eternity to lament our foolishness (Revelation 21:8). I don’t care who you are and what you possess, that is a tremendous price to pay for something as reckless as adultery.

Surely these are valid reasons for husbands and wives to remain committed to one another. Nothing good comes from yielding to sexual immorality. Nothing. And if you think you will find happiness in that forbidden relationship, you are deceived. The divorce rates in subsequent marriages (formed in adultery) are significantly higher than first marriages. This is inevitable because a couple who cheats with one another will eventually cheat on one another. They will always have to wonder if such betrayal and lack of integrity will be used against them. So let us remember that whenever we are confronted with temptation and the opportunity to sin, which is quite often in our lust-filled world. While there is a price to pay for being unfaithful, there is great value to gain in remaining loyal and devoted to our spouse and vice-versa. Remember God's promise: godliness with contentment is great gain both in this life and the next (1 Timothy 4:8; 6:6).

Can we be forgiven of adultery? Absolutely (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Is it possible to regain trust and respect over time? Yes. But are we better off avoiding such trouble to begin with? Without question! Wisdom is *"more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her"* (Proverbs 3:16-18).

Can Two Walk Together...?

IS THAT REALLY WHAT IT MEANS?

William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

In 2015 we ran a series of articles under the theme "Is that really what it means?" Over the next several months, we will add to the material from that series, Lord willing.

The Bible emphasizes the need for unity and peace among God's people. We can find texts in both the Old (Psalm 133:1; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; 1 Chronicles 12:17) and New Testaments (John 17:21-23; Romans 12:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1-6) that tell us to pursue unity. Several years ago, I taught an eight lesson series on the topic - there is that much material and more in the Bible about unity.

Occasionally in the discussion of unity among God's people, you will hear folks reference a short, but powerful verse in Amos. It reads:

Can two walk together, unless they are agreed? (Amos 3:3)

Amen! What a great verse; a wonderful testimony from God's word about the necessity for brethren to have unity. Indeed, how can Christians walk with one another if we do not share (and walk by) the common faith of the gospel? Truly, it is a great verse, and it is essential that fellow believers be of one mind in the faith. What more needs to be said?

But was Amos really discussing the need for unity among God's people? Though the verse has been used that way, we need to look at the context to see if this is really what the prophet was saying.

Please take some time to read the context of Amos 3:3 now. I've often suggested to folks a good rule of thumb, at least to begin with, is to use at least a 15 verse context (7 verses before, 7 verses after). Perhaps start at Amos 2:11 and read through Amos 3:10.

Nothing in the context indicates a lack of unity among the people of Israel. The prophet does point out their wickedness (Amos 2:11-13) and the judgment of God upon them because of it (Amos 2:14-3:2), but it seems the nation was fairly united in their opposition to those who spoke on behalf of God.

Amos 3:3 is not a command for God's people to walk in unity with one another.

Based on Amos 3:1-2, I once thought the two who are spoken of in the text are God and Israel. It certainly is true that God's people need to walk God's way. Sadly, Israel had turned from the LORD - and so how could He walk with them if they would not agree with Him? Though this is true (and holds true for the church and the Lord today), it is not the point the prophet was making.

Before we discuss what Amos is saying, I want to make an observation about the two potential applications we just looked at. Both points are valid and true:

1. Fellowship with one another requires us to agree on what God's word says. A lack of agreement is why there is so much division in the religious world today.
2. It is impossible to have fellowship with God if we refuse to follow His word. He's not going to change His will for you or I.

The truthfulness of these statements does not justify the misusing of Amos 3:3. We need to be honest Bible students. It will destroy our credibility with those we are trying to teach if we misuse a verse to make our point.

Now then, what is Amos talking about? In Amos 2:11, the Lord says He raised up prophets and Nazirites. The people of Israel mistreated these men who were dedicated to serving God. They
...gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets, saying, 'Do not prophesy!' (Amos 2:12)

Though these men of God were abused and rejected by the nation, they were accepted, even appointed by God. Though the nation refused God's way, these men walked with God and He with them.

Amos presents a series of rhetorical questions (Amos 3:4-6), each one showing a cause and effect relationship. If the lion has killed his prey, he will roar. If there is no trap, the bird will not be ensnared. If the trumpet blows (signifying an enemy at hand), the people will respond in fear. Every effect has an adequate cause.

Why did the prophets come preaching against the nation? They did not do this of their own accord. A few chapters later, Amos would say:

I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. (Amos 7:14)

Why would a man who made his living with livestock and fruit come preaching against the nation? In Amos 7:15, he reveals that the Lord told him to go prophesy to Israel. Amos fulfilled the calling he received from the Lord - he went and prophesied against Israel. He was in agreement with God, obeying the calling and declaring the Lord's message. Amos and the rest of the prophets (Amos 3:7) walked together with the LORD. The text is about God and His messengers. They were not speaking on their own; they were proclaiming the word of God - *"...the Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8)*. Therefore they proclaimed (Amos 3:9) and they heard and testified (Amos 3:13).

That You May Know

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13).

Several years ago a friend of mine who believes that sincere Christians are continuously cleansed by the blood of Christ from sins of ignorance and weakness asked me two questions: first, Do you think you might be wrong about some issue of faith? I replied, "Of course." Then he asked, "How do you know you are saved?" Let's come back to that.

The apostle John knew that having the assurance of salvation rather than living in doubt was sufficiently important that he wrote the book of First John for the purpose of assuring Christians that we can know we are saved. This assurance of salvation gives us the incentive to keep on believing. How can we know we are saved?

Basis: God Is

Loving: Our assurance begins with a proper understanding of God. Our denominational friends emphasize the love of God (1 John 4:8, 16) while ignoring His wrath (Hebrews 12:28-29), but we must not let that cause us to overlook His great love. There's a whole lot more to salvation than John 3:16, but John 3:16 is still the foundation for our assurance of a home in heaven. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). It is still true that "so" is an adverb of degree. It expresses the depth of God's love for all the people of the world. He loves us so much He did not withhold His one and only Son from dying on the cruel cross so we could spend eternity with Him in heaven. This was and is the greatest expression of the greatest love possible in all the world and for all eternity. That love is for all people without exception or limit. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4). "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

Jonathan Edwards was a Puritan preacher in New England in the 18th century, he is considered the greatest theologian of Colonial America, and he became president of Princeton. He was a strict Calvinist who believed God's saving love was limited to the elect. His famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God," is still in print. Here's a paragraph from it as preached in Enfield, Massachusetts, July 8, 1741.

"The God that holds you over the Pit of Hell, much as one holds a Spider, or some loathsome Insect, over the Fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like Fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the Fire; he is of purer Eyes than to bear to have you in his sight, you are ten thousand Times so abominable in his Eyes as the most hateful venomous venomous Serpent is in ours."

Edwards was talking to and about unrepentant sinners.

Ethan Allen, the father of the State of Vermont, grew up in this period hearing this kind of preaching. Allen even considered becoming a preacher, but this doctrine so incensed him, he became an unbeliever in the Bible and Christ. He became a hard cussing, hard fighting, hard drinking deist. Many others of this period became like Allen for the same reason.

Gracious: God's saving grace is for all mankind without exception or limit. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). Because of His love and grace He has done, is doing, and will continue to do everything possible consistent with His nature and ours to bring us to eternal life.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32)

This is reasoning from the greater to the lesser. He gave the greatest possible gift to effect our salvation, His only Son. Therefore, He will not hold back anything else we need to gain heaven, but will freely, abundantly grant these needs as well.

But He cannot violate His own nature, and He will not violate ours. He is so infinitely holy He cannot even be tempted to sin (1 Peter 1:15-16; James 1:13). Therefore He cannot fellowship sin nor sinners in their sin (1 John 1:5-6).

You and I are not robots but have freedom of will to choose salvation or condemnation (Revelation 22:17). If you choose to turn away from Christ into sin, though it grieves Him terribly, He will not rob you of your inherent free will.

Longsuffering: God is longsuffering; He puts up with our sins without immediately casting us into hell. This is because He wants everyone to be saved from our sins (2 Peter 3:9). We should be thankful for every day of life we are given, and consider each day an opportunity to learn our sins and repent, so we can be saved (2 Peter 3:15).

Faithful: God is faithful, trustworthy (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24); He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). As a young parent I sometimes lied to my children without meaning to do so. I promised them a treat or trip and later forgot or was unable to do what I had promised. I sinned against my children when I did that. God is not so. He always delivers what He promises.

Able: Unlike me, our Father is always able to do as He promises. Paul had delivered the keeping of his spirit to God in regard to the day of judgment, and he knew the Lord God was able to safely keep it for that day (2 Timothy 1:12). The Lord is stronger than Satan and will not allow the wicked one to send us such a strong temptation that we are unable to resist it (1 Corinthians 10:13). I can turn away from the Lord if I choose, but Satan cannot make me deny Christ or turn to sin. No one has to sin or turn away from the Lord.

Accessible: Our Father is accessible to His children. The deists of Ethan Allen's day believed God created the world then simply withdrew into His heaven to watch what we do but never interfered in the affairs of men, leaving us completely to our own devices. Not so. God is near to His people (James 4:8). We have an Advocate, a High Priest, through whom we can boldly come into the very presence of God through prayer (1 John 2:1-2; Hebrews 4:14-16).

Active: Thus, again in direct contrast to the philosophy of deism, God is active though unseen in our salvation. He promises He will hear and answer our prayers that are in harmony with His will (1 John 5:14-15).

Means: We Walk

The means of our assurance of salvation is our walk, our manner of life. "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

We can know God's will. We have the ability to know the will of God for us. Those Christians to whom John wrote knew all things (1 John 2:20). We can have the same knowledge in the mystery of Christ the apostle Paul had (Ephesians 3:4). In fact, it is our duty to understand the will of God (Ephesians 5:17).

We can avoid sin. Brother Edgar J. Dye said a member of a congregation where he once preached claimed he couldn't drive across town without sinning. Brother Dye informed him he needed to start repenting. Many brethren are so influenced by denominational teaching that we have a sinful nature that they view sin as unavoidable. We have all sinned (1 John 1:8, 10), but sin is not inevitable in our future lives. John wrote so that brethren would not sin, and told us what to do "if" rather than "when" we sin (1 John 2:1-2). Paul commanded us not to sin (1 Corinthians 15:34). Those who go on sinning belong to the devil rather than to Christ (1 John 3:8). The Lord's "commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). They are within our ability and for our good.

We can know our sins. Since sin is a transgression of the will of God (1 John 3:4), and we can know God's will, we can know whether or not we have sinned. We don't accidentally sin. All sin springs from the heart and reveals a defect of the heart (Matthew 15:18-20).

We can know enough to go to heaven. There is danger in ignorance (Matthew 15:14), so we all need to become mature in knowledge and conduct (Hebrews 5:12 - 6:1). But there is security at various levels of maturity, so long as we are walking by the proper standard with the proper attitude (Philippians 3:15-16).

We don't have to understand everything in the Bible. Some who are weak do not understand their liberties in Christ, which the strong comprehend (Romans 14:1-3). Regardless, as long as such a one is not transgressing the will of God, "God has received him" (Romans 14:3).

When we are unsure, we can refrain from a practice. The way we maintain our security as we mature from weak to strong is by refusing to participate in things we are not sure about (Romans 14:23) while refusing to censoriously judge those who do participate (Romans 14:3).

The sincere seeker will be successful. Now if I admit I might be wrong on a question of faith, and if I must repent of every sin to be forgiven of it (Acts 8:22), how can I have confidence in my salvation? Faith. God who cannot lie has promised if I will sincerely seek His righteousness, I will receive it (Matthew 7:7-8). I must trust Him. I must believe "that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). If I am diligently, sincerely seeking to do His will, I will find and do His will, and He will ultimately save me in heaven.

Conclusion

My friend, If you lack confidence in your salvation, either you lack faith in God, or you know you are not living right, or both. Trust God to save you (Hebrews 11:6). If your heart condemns you for the life you are living, God is greater than you, and He knows your sins as well. If your heart, honestly guided by His word, does not condemn you, you have confidence toward God (1 John 3:20-21). This will bring great joy (1 John 1:4).

The story goes that a sail ship in the eighteenth century was off the coast of Maine when it was struck by a tremendous Nor'easter. As the gale force winds and mountainous waves were driving the struggling ship toward the jagged rocks of the coast, passengers were crying, praying, and singing. One little girl was perfectly calm. A frightened passenger asked her how she remain calm in the dire circumstances. She calmly replied, My daddy is the captain of the ship. He won't let us be wrecked.

Friend, you can have confidence in your eternal salvation. Trust and obey the Captain of your salvation.

*"Trust and obey, for there's no other way,
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey"*
(*"Trust And Obey," John H. Sammis*).

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