

## *How Can I Be Sure?*

By Tom Wacaster

When I was doing local work I was frequently asked the question, “How can I be sure that I am saved?” I have no doubt that those asking the question were sincere, and in many instances those asking the question were among those whom I considered to be some of the most faithful workers in the church. Why is it, then, that such otherwise strong Christians had this nagging doubt about their salvation? Why is it that we are prone to doubt when the Bible clearly tells us that we can know we have salvation?

In one sense questioning one’s status in life as well as his spiritual status with his God is healthy. The following is attributed to an Egyptian king by the name of Akhenaton: “True wisdom is less presuming than folly. The wise man doubteth often, and changeth his mind; the fool is obstinate, and doubteth not; he knoweth all things but his own ignorance.” Another expressed the wisdom in doubting like this: “How prone to doubt, how cautious are the wise!” (Alexander Pope). Even some of the strongest of Bible characters had their questions and doubts. Abraham doubted God’s promise that he would have a child in his old age through whom the Lord would bless the world and sought instead to have Ishmael fill that role. Thomas would not believe the Lord had been raised from the dead until he could see it with his own eyes and touch the Lord’s side with his own hands. Even John the baptist had some very serious questions about the Lord when he (John) was facing the closing days of his life in prison. You see, doubt should drive us to deeper investigation and self examination. What, then, is the answer to our doubts and fears regarding death, salvation, and that spiritual realm wherein our hope resides as an anchor of the soul? There are at least three factors that affect the depth of our confidence: faith, facts, and feelings. These sustain an important relationship to one another and play a vital role in developing assurance in the heart of the child of God.

The Hebrews writer defines faith as “assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). The KJV reads, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” I am interested here in the Greek word translated “assurance” (ASV) and “substance” (KJV). The word denotes support for something; something upon which a hope is based. Barclay points out three distinct areas in which faith and hope find application: (1) It is belief against the world; (2) It is belief in the spirit against the senses; (3) It is belief in the future against the present. Or as one author put it, “Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and achieves the impossible.” But we must not lose sight of the undeniable truth that our “faith” rests upon “facts.” I believe in God because of the “facts.” The KJV sums it up with the word “evidence.” When a jury sits in judgment upon an accused, they do so based upon “facts.”

Now we come to “feelings.” Feelings, or emotions, in and of themselves, are good. God created us to feel, to be moved with compassion, to shed a tear over someone else’s loss (or even our own losses). If man had been created completely void of emotions and/or feelings he would experience no sorrow; but then, neither would he experience joy and happiness. It is important to note that God warns us against the deceptive nature of feelings. “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.” (Prov. 16:25).

Now with all that said, it seems to this humble scribe that the absence of assurance among those who have obeyed the gospel, and who are doing their best to live a faithful Christian life is due to the failure to keep faith, fact, and feelings in proper relationship. Fact: God has promised forgiveness, along with a home in heaven, to those who obey the gospel and live a faithful Christian life. Faith: I believe what God has said because of the evidence that supports that promise. Feelings: I rejoice in that assurance, knowing that, though I fall far short of what I should be, God has promised to save me to the “uttermost” through the cleansing power of the blood of His Son. It is when men take their eyes OFF of the facts, and allow their faith to falter, that their feelings kick in and they no longer “feel” as if they are saved. Remember, “faith comes by hearing...the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Or as one put it, “Doubt comes in at the window when inquiry is denied at the door.”

A pilot is instructed to always trust the instruments rather than the way he feels. Feelings can be deceptive. The same rule applies spiritually. Trust the instruments that God has given to us in the word. His promises are sure; the evidence incontrovertible. If the instruments contradict what you feel, then it is your feelings that are wrong and not the instruments! If you walk by your feelings rather than trust in the word of God you will rob yourself of the joy and happiness that comes with God’s promises. But worse yet, you will never rid yourself of doubt, and you will continue to be plagued by the unanswered question, “How can I be sure?”