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Understanding our Salvation and Security in Jesus Through the Character of God

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“Therefore, If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;
the old has gone, the new has come!”

2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV

It is unfortunate that for many of us, the most common feelings we have as Christians are not joy and thankfulness, but anxiety and fear. One of Satan’s most successful tactics of disruption and disturbance is to induce fear about the reliability of God’s love in the hearts of his children. Jesus called Satan “the Father of Lies” (John 8:44, NLT), and as such he delights to cause pain by convincing us that God’s promises are untrue. One of the most common lies to ensnare Christians of any age tells us that God doesn’t really give us eternal life *just* by believing in his son Jesus. The Lie tells us that although we may have accepted Christ as our savior, this was just the first step. In order to keep our place in heaven we must keep God happy through an endless list of other activities, such as praying everyday, confessing *every* sin, and always *always*, leading good “Christian” lives. If we ever falter or make one mistake, if we ever commit a sin and forget to ask forgiveness, if we ever get mad at God, or if we don’t go to church every Sunday, we will loose our salvation. While praying and other such activities are wonderful and necessary for development into mature Christians, *none of them has anything to do with our salvation*. According to the Lie, however, our salvation doesn’t depend on Jesus, but on our own ability to “be good”, therefore, none of us can relax- we must always be frightened, anxiously trying to stay on the “right” side of God- if we don’t, we

will find ourselves back on the road to hell as if we had never known Jesus at all.

It is probable that every one of us has felt the terror of this lie at some point in our lives, and some of us may spend everyday living in its dread. The good news is that our heavenly Father does *not* want us to live under the power this fear, or with any guilty fear at all! The Bible says that when you became a Christian “you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear...” (Romans 8:15, NIV), but that God’s perfect love “...drives out fear...” (I John 4:18, NIV). Satan’s lies are the absolute opposite of what God has told us about salvation, and like all lies, the best remedy against them is Truth. Jesus said “...truth will set you free” (John 8:32, NIV). Therefore, let us examine what God has said to us through his Word, the source of truth. With the Bible’s help we can build weapons of truth against Satan’s lies, and free ourselves from fear and false ideas about our God.

I believe that a great deal of all fear about our eternal security in Christ feeds off of misunderstandings we have about the personality of God. Such misunderstandings about God are understandable; he has the most complex personality in the universe! He is three persons in one, he has existed for an eternity before any of us were born, he is omniscient (knowing everything), and completely perfect! There are some things about this awesome and incredible being that we, as mere humans, can never understand. Despite this, God has put all of the information about himself that we *can* understand in his Bible, and there is more than enough to fight off lies about loosing our salvation. I believe that understanding four parts of God’s personality; his loving kindness, his powerfulness, his faithfulness, and his justness, can help us defeat Satan’s lies.

The first of these, God’s loving kindness, is probably something you have heard a lot about. Even so, it is the foundation of our security, so another look won’t hurt. The Bible says that God *is* love (I John 4:16, NIV). What does this mean? The love which makes up God’s nature is not the same as the “love” we have for candy or arithmetic; or even as the love we have for our family- although this type of love is probably the closest analogy we have. The apostle Paul lists the characteristics of this love (the attitudes and behaviors it always exhibits) in I Corinthians 13: 4-8. Among them he states that

love “always protects, always trusts, always hopes, [and] always perseveres” (v7, NIV). If God really loves us, then we know that he always protects us, and *always* trusts us- no matter how many times we sin against him. No matter how often we show that we are sinners, God will *never* give up hope for us, because love always hopes; God will *never* stop working in us to make us holy like Jesus, because love *always* perseveres. In essence, love never abandons or stops loving. We will not loose our salvation, because God our Father loves us- he will never stop loving us (love doesn’t behave this way) - and if he loves us, he will do what he promised and bring us to heaven to be with him.

We have the greatest proof of God’s loving kindness in Jesus Christ. Most Christians know by memory John 3:16, which tells us that the reason Jesus came to Earth was because the Father sent him, and the reason the Father sent him was because he “so loved the world”. We know the words; what is lost is the magnitude of their meaning. Jesus is what the Father loves most. He is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15, NIV), the “fullness of God” (Colossians 2:9, NLT), and the “only begotten Son” (John 3:16, NIV). He is everything good and perfect and Holy and wonderful about the three person God in bodily form. The Father *loves* him. If God sends what he loves most in all existence to suffer and die for us, it is obvious that he must love us as well. Paul explains it this way:

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed *his great love for us* by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5:6-8; NLT, italics mine)

Would a father sacrifice his beloved son for bad people if he cared nothing about these people? Of course not! God loves us, and wants us to be in a relationship with him. If we love Jesus, the Father loves us; as Jesus told his disciples “...the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God” (John 16:27, NLT). Christ was willing to be sacrificed, and the Father was willing to sacrifice him, so that wretchedly bad people like you and I might be granted salvation. After such a demonstration of love, the idea that God would simply cast us off is absurd and untrue. God knows we are sinners; we were sinners when Jesus came to die for us-

that is *why* he came to die for us! Our sin cannot frighten him away. As Paul said of God:

I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. *Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away.* Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, *nothing in all creation* will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39; NLT, italics mine).

The love God has shown us is a binding love, a love that lasts through eternity. He will never forget about us; we are safe in his love.

I hope it easier to see now that God *desires* that we keep our salvation. The next idea to address is that God is *powerful enough* to accomplish his desires. God's powerlessness is an aspect of his character which is important for our understanding of security. What good are his desires and his promises if he isn't strong enough to fulfill them? We know that the power of God is great, but we might still be afraid that there is something stronger that even God cannot fight against. Is there anything stronger? Is there any person, or force, or idea that might overcome even God's power and defeat our hopes of eternal life? No way! Satan wants us to think that God is too weak to save people as terrible as each of us knows we are, but the Bible tells us that the power of God is *unimaginable*. When trying to help us understand this awesome power, God asks us:

“To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. (Isaiah 40:25-26, NIV)

We need to remember that the same God who created the mighty stars, the hurricanes, the volcanoes, Mt. Everest, and everything else in the universe which puzzles and astounds the greatest human scientists is the one who promises to bring us to his heaven for eternity.

Yet, even in the presence of the wonderful power of God we see around us, we might still want to ask: What about sin? Outside of God, *sin* seems to be the most powerful force in existence. We know that sin can separate us from God, because the Bible says the “wages

of sin is death” (Romans 6:23, NIV). This means that everyone who sins “earns” death, and not only physical death, but spiritual death. Spiritual death is the permanent inability to understand, appreciate, or even see what is holy, good, and true; in other words the inability to see or know God, for all eternity. Sin, then, is the only thing which we might (incorrectly) imagine is able to keep God from saving us. Satan wants us to believe that the power of sin is greater than the power of God, but this is absolutely *not true*. Out of every wonderful miracle recorded in the Bible, what is God’s most incredible display of power? Raising our Lord Jesus from the dead, of course! On the cross Christ took every of sin of every person (people alive then, people already dead, and people not yet born) on himself. Then, he took all of the wages of this sin, which was death. Jesus died on the cross and lay in the grave for three days. There, the power of sin had every opportunity to prove itself stronger than the power of God- but sin lost! On the third day, God overcame death and raised Jesus from the dead just as he had said he would. At that moment, sin was declared absolutely defeated in the competition between the power of sin and the power of God. Death was the most powerful thing sin could accomplish, but the power of God *was stronger than the power of sin*. We should not be afraid of sin’s power then, because the Bible says that this same God-power used to win against sin is what the Father is using in us:

“begin to understand the incredible greatness of his [God’s] power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 1:19-20, NLT).

The same power used to defeat sin and raise Jesus from the dead is what God uses to make our salvation secure. The second we accepted Jesus, God raised our souls from the dead, and on the last day he will raise our bodies also! Sin has already lost the fight, so we know that God has won the battle for our eternal destiny. As Jesus said, “...this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them to eternal life at the last day” (John 6:39, NLT). God *wills* that you be brought to heaven by Jesus on the last day, and he has the *power* to accomplish his will.

So far we have seen that God desires our safety in his love because of his *loving-kindness*, and that he is able to accomplish it because of his *powerfulness*. The next aspect of his character, his *faithfulness*, shows us that aside from just wanting our eternal security and being strong enough to achieve it, he is faithful to his promises and will *actually do* what he has said. Therefore, we should quickly review *what* God has said about our situation as Christians.

First and most importantly, God has said that our *faith* in the ability of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to take away the guilt of our sin, and in the power of his resurrection to give us eternal life, *guarantees* us salvation from Hell. “If you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, *you will be saved*” (Romans 10:9; NIV, italics mine).

Second, God promises that once you have been saved by Jesus, God will make you into his image; he will *sanctify* you, or change your sinful nature into the same holy and beautiful nature in Jesus. The Bible says, “...as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him [Jesus] and reflect his glory even more” (II Corinthians 3:18; NLT).

This is an important point: the instant you believed in Jesus, God guaranteed you a spot in heaven. This was your *salvation*, and it is finished! What happens for the rest of your life is *sanctification*, and it continues until you die. All of the difficult situations we experience, all of our sufferings and even all of our sin (after we become Christians) God uses to teach us important lessons which will make us more like Jesus. That is why we still struggle with so many problems and sins even after becoming Christians. Our problems are not proof that we aren't really saved; just the opposite, *they are proof that God is working in us*.

Third, God has promised to finish this work of sanctification; he will not give-up on us, but will finish making us like Jesus and bring us into heaven. When writing to a group of new Christians, Paul stated that he knew “...that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again” (Philippians 1:6, NLT). We see, therefore, that God's promises carry us safely from our sin into salvation and life as new creations designed to be like Jesus.

The question then, is will God keep these promises? After all, why should he? We aren't very faithful to him, and disobey him every day. Fortunately for us, the fact that God is faithful to his promises is a major lesson God teaches throughout the Bible. Moses, when he was introducing God to the Israelites, said: "Understand, therefore, that the LORD your God is indeed God. He is the *faithful* God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and constantly loves those who love him ..." (Deuteronomy 7:9; NLT, italics mine). All throughout the Old Testament God was faithful to the covenant (or promise) he made with Israel, despite the fact that they disobeyed him again and again. He was faithful for the simple reason that he had made a promise to Abraham hundreds of years before that he would make Abraham's descendants (the Israelites) his own chosen people. The Old and New Testaments are full of proof that God is faithful to all of his promises, even when the people he made the promises with disobey him.

Once God makes a promise, he keeps it! Why? *Because he cares about the glory of his name.* A long time ago, a person's name was like their logo. It embodied everything people knew about them, both good and bad, in the same way that the Nike sign lets you know that the shoes you buy are good shoes (or bad, if you don't like Nike). God's name is still like this, but unlike Nike, or any other human or company, God is perfect. Therefore, his name, or his logo, must represent his perfection. As he said: "...I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me" (Isaiah 46:9). When explaining the reason he honors his name, God says: "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to anyone else. I will not share my praise..." (Isaiah 42:8). People who don't keep their promises are known by others as untrustworthy, and they have bad "logos" or reputations. Therefore, God honors his promises no matter how badly we behave, for the sake of his own glory. When David described God's faithfulness in Psalm 23 he said: "he [God] leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (v 3, NIV). As a result, every promise made in the Bible for the salvation of people will be kept by our God. Even more encouraging for us today is the fact that all of these promises apply to you and I if we believe in Jesus, for the Bible says that "...no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' *in Christ*" (2 Corinthians 1:20; NIV, italics mine).

We see that God has made many promises throughout the Bible stating that he will save us from our sins and transform us into new holy creations that can live with him. We also see that for the sake of his name he will keep every single one of them, even when we don't obey him like we should. Therefore, let us stop being afraid of God, and do what the Bible says : "...let us go right into the presence of God, with true hearts fully trusting him. ... Without wavering, let us hold tightly to the hope we say we have, for God *can be trusted to keep his promise*" (Hebrews 10:22-23; NLT, italics mine).

Finally, let us examine God's *justness*. Psalm 97 tells us that "righteousness and justice are the foundation of his [God's] throne" (v 2, NIV). That is, God's power (symbolized by the word "throne", which is a chair that represents a King's royal power), is based in justice. This means that all actions based in God's power- like our salvation and our eternal security- must *also* be based in God's justness. Thankfully, Scripture has very specifically explained the justness of God's work for us in Christ Jesus.

Before Jesus died for us, the only way humans could have any relationship with God was through animal sacrifices. We know that sin makes it impossible for us to know God, and remembering that the "wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23, NIV), we can see that in order for us to talk with God without our sin driving us from his presence *someone had to pay our sin wages*. Unfortunately, this "someone" was animals, and many died because of human wickedness. Animals, however, could not completely *atone* (or pay the wages of) human sin. In Genesis God tells us that humans are created in God's own image (1:27, NIV). Being in God's image means that we have the ability to know right from wrong like God, and that we are different from all other created things- we are in our own spiritual category. Because of this, when we sin it is very serious and we "earn" the most expensive wages. An animal *not* created in God's image, and therefore not in our category, can never pay the expensive "sin debt" we owe God. If we tried to pay our own sin debt, we would have to take the death we earned, and this means we would go straight to Hell for *all eternity* because humans are *not* more powerful than sin.

A permanent relationship with God could only be achieved if someone who *was* more powerful than sin paid the sin wages and then shared his power with us. Of course, this is *exactly* what Jesus did! As

the Bible explains it, “... God put into effect a ... plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins” (Romans 8:3, NLT). Jesus paid the wages for our sin, “So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1, NLT). This means that the debt we owed God *does not exist anymore*. Therefore, if Satan is telling us that we should fear God because he is keeping track of our sins, this is ridiculous! If we have salvation today through Jesus, we are free from our debt to God *forever*, we cannot be charged with our sin *ever again*. If God were to charge us with our sin *after* we have accepted the payment of Jesus, this would be *unjust*- it would be the same as if a restaurant charged children again for their dinners after their parents had already paid. God cannot be unjust, so we can rely on him to count our sin debt “cancelled” if we have accepted his payment. God’s *justness* is seen in how he made sure that the sin debt we owed him was paid, and in how he will never charge us for that debt again.

Why do we so often believe Satan’s lie that our ability to “be good” is really what saves us? I think it is because deep inside, each of us knows that we really are sinful, and that we don’t deserve for God to save us. In fact, the idea that a perfect God would descend to earth to save *us* (the people that God knows we are inside) for *free*, is so hard to understand that we think it must not be true, and that God must want us to pay something for the privilege of going to heaven. We start to believe that our eternal destiny depends not on the perfection of the sacrifice Jesus made for us, but on our own power. Salvation, however, comes *only* through Jesus Christ- nothing we do can earn it; it is the free gift of God to all who believe in his son. Remember, we are not powerful enough to pay our debt- only Jesus is!

We must always bear in mind that salvation is God’s gift to us, and then think very carefully about the God who is giving us this gift. If we do this we will remember that we cannot add anything to the work Jesus did to save us, it is perfect and finished. We will also remember God’s loving-kindness, his powerfulness, his faithfulness, and his justness, and know that *this* God can be depended upon to protect our souls. Then we will say with the Apostle Paul: “I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have

entrusted to him until the day of his return” (2 Timothy 1:12, NLT). So in response to Satan’s lies, let us say: Our eternal salvation is secure in God. He loves us. He is strong enough to save us, and he is faithful to his promises to use his power to set us free from sin. Finally, he paid our sin debt for us, and he would be unjust if he punished us for our sins after we accepted his payment through Jesus. In light of such good news, throw fears about loosing your salvation aside, and *rejoice* in the Lord!