

Security of the Believer

Insecurity concerning God's opinion of me can weaken or destroy an essential characteristic of faith. The following passages promote a realistic hope:

- Romans 8:18 – 25 The “birth pangs” of creation, as it seeks to break free from its “futility,” are used as an illustration of our own “groaning within ourselves.” Specifics are lacking, but the concept is that our imperfections should generate hope, not destroy hope.
- Romans 15:4 One of reasons for the Scriptures (in this context, the Old Testament) is to give us hope. David and Abraham are held up as examples of faith that we should imitate, yet they had some serious flaws.
- 1 Peter 1:3 – 5, 13 - 16 “Reserved in heaven for you” and “kept by the power of God through faith” assure us that our hope is based on God's mercy and grace, not on our performance. Holiness is our response to that hope.

However, some passages can imply a high standard for acceptable faith:

- Romans 4:16 ...Those who have the faith of Abraham...”
- Colossians 1:23 “If you continue in the faith, ...not moved away from the hope of the gospel...”
- Titus 2:11 – 14 “Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts...looking for the blessed hope”
- Hebrews 6:10 – 12 “That you not become sluggish...”
- 1 John 3:2 – 3 “Everyone who has this hope purifies himself.”

Some have failed to reconcile all passages concerning the security of the believer, promoting insecurity.

- Matthew 25:31 – 46 Judgment appears to be based on performance.
- Romans 2:6 According to his deeds.
- 2 Corinthians 5:10 According to what he has done.
- Revelation 20:12 The dead were judged according to their works

Attempting to overcome the guilt that is the destruction of hope (and therefore faith), others have espoused an equally unrealistic position that performance is unimportant. These theories have a wide range, but all have the common characteristic of drawing conclusions from too little information. One example is the theory that “God could never reject His children. No matter what my children may do, they will always be my children.” This has several flaws:

- The illustration is not from the Bible.
- It is based on law (what my children may do) instead of faith.
- The classification of “children of God” is undefined. Is this everyone? The faithful?
- The illustration suggests that unbelievers will be welcomed into heaven.
- The New Testament contains at least 15 examples of people who had faith but then rejected it. Explanations must allow people to freely choose to stop believing.
- Jesus said the way was narrow (Matthew 7:14) and that those who deny Him will be denied (Luke 12:9).

How do we teach a realistic security that avoids guilt, addresses performance, and promotes faith?

- James 1:20 – 25 Our response to seeing ourselves in the light of the gospel (a comparison in which we always fall short) is to set about to do the things of the gospel. Our actions are a response, not a qualification.
 - James 2:14 – 26 Acceptable faith results in activity. However, James does not imply that activity is a precondition of acceptable faith. Rather, his point is that acceptable faith will act; claiming to have faith without action is self-deception. But, defining an acceptable threshold of response leaves potential for guilt.
 - Galatians 2:19 – 21 The result of dying to law is living by faith. “I” have died; Jesus lives in me. The occasions when our walk is less than that of Jesus can lead to guilt that destroys faith.
 - Ephesians 2:8 – 10 Our actions are a response to His grace.
 - 1 Corinthians 15:9 Paul was motivated by God’s grace, not by guilt.
 - Romans 6 Those who have received grace respond by forsaking sin.
 - 1 John 3:20 This cuts both ways. God knows the truth about our faith. (John 8:32 – “and the truth shall make you free.”)
 - Hebrews 12:28 We are acceptable through grace (cf., Colossians 1:10, 2 Corinthians 2:16)
 - 2 Corinthians 5:11 “Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.” Our faith promotes evangelism rather than a focus on me. Paul begins the discussion by reminding the Corinthians that his adequacy is from God (3:5). Then he extends the concept to all Christians (3:15 – 18).
 - Philippians 3:13 – 14 “Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.” Deciding whether past faith was adequate is fruitless. The adequacy of faith only relates to the present.
1. We cannot fear the truth about ourselves, no matter how bad that truth is. God already knows, so there is nothing to cover up.
 2. When we act out the love of God that has been poured out in our hearts (Romans 5:5), we have no thought of ourselves, but only of others. My doubts about my ability are no longer significant. This leads to evangelism.
 3. The past is of no importance. Faith exists only in the present. We are secure in the present. “Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own troubles.” Seek the kingdom now. That is all that matters.
 4. This is the same argument as the one for perfection (Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect). Debating whether I can make every choice correctly from now until death is irrelevant according to New Testament thinking. I have the ability to choose faith now. When tomorrow becomes today, I will have the same opportunity.