

WEEK 9
04.30.17

SECURE IN GOD'S ABIDING PRESENCE



FOCUS VERSE

Ephesians 1:13

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.

LESSON TEXT

Psalms 91:1-11

1 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

2 I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

3 Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

5 Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

6 Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.

8 Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

9 Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation;

10 There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

Ephesians 4:11-16

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.



FOCUS THOUGHT

God seals His work with His abiding presence, and we are secure in Him.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Alone in the Dark

Everything was fine the first time I stayed home alone until it came time to go to bed. I realized I would be alone in the dark. I had never been particularly afraid of the dark, but the effort it would take to turn off the bedroom lamp seemed Herculean. Yet I feared that if my parents found me up after bedtime, or sleeping with my light on, they would judge me to be undeserving of their trust. I paced in front of that lamp not knowing what to do. Finally, I decided to bargain with God. I told Him that if He would keep me safe, I would let Him fill me with the Spirit when I turned thirteen. I don't know why I thought I would be doing God a favor by letting Him

save me, and I don't know why I chose age thirteen (other than it seemed a long time away). There was no angelic appearance or heavenly voice saying, "You've got a deal," but that childish prayer was enough to give me the courage to turn off the lamp and peacefully go to sleep.

A half-century later, I still find myself acting as if God wants a *quid pro quo*. I try to strike bargains by childishly offering something He already owns to earn something He has freely given. But since age thirteen, I have been sealed by His Spirit. When it comes time for the last lamp to be extinguished, I know I will sleep peacefully.

OUTLINE

I. SECURITY THROUGH DIVINE STRUCTURE

- A. Authority Structure in the New Testament Church
- B. Results and Benefits of Authority

II. SECURITY THROUGH HIS ABIDING PRESENCE

- A. We Abide under the Shadow of the Almighty
- B. God Is Our Refuge and Fortress
- C. God Is Able to Keep Us from Falling
- D. The Comforter Abides Forever

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

It is not unusual for those who have experienced the joy of being born of water and Spirit to wrestle, at some point in their spiritual development, with questions about their salvation. For example, Andrew D. Urshan, one of the most influential people in the early twentieth-century Oneness Pentecostal movement, described his personal struggle in his autobiography.

Urshan had an idealistic view of what life would be like after he was baptized with the Holy Spirit. For one week after his Spirit

baptism, he was full of joy. But his joy was short-lived, and in its place came a spiritual dryness that lasted four weeks. He later likened it to Jesus' temptation after His baptism. As Urshan struggled to find some internal grace, he felt there was only one thing to do—use his common sense. Occasionally he heard a still, small voice telling him to keep his balance.

Urshan's common sense told him that in his earlier life, faith in the Bible alone had kept him from sin when he had been severely tempted. Based on this, he said to himself, "Forever I will cling to this Bible and stand upon its precious promises, if there is nothing more now and forever." Spiritual victory followed this strong decision. Urshan wrote, "The glory of God burst in my very being as rivers. It seemed my whole being was aflame, the glory of God so filled the place and I was so mightily blessed." Words failed him to explain the glorious ecstasy he experienced.

This story may surprise some, but clues in the New Testament indicate that at least some first-century believers were concerned about the security of their salvation. Any verse of Scripture emphasizing God's ability to keep us is there to assure those who have questions about their salvation. For instance, Jude wrote:

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). If no one in the first-century church had been concerned about the loss of salvation, this verse would have been unnecessary.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (I Corinthians 15:1–4).

As we search the Scriptures on the subject of the assurance of salvation, we must keep in mind Paul’s powerful description of the gospel and its effects. Several essential points arise from these four verses.

First, the gospel is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. We emphasize the phrase “according to the Scriptures” because this connects the gospel with Old Testament prophecy. (See Luke 24:44–49.) The Greek word translated *gospel* (*euangelion*) means “good news.”

Second, because Christ died for our sins, we no longer have a sin problem. In His death on the cross, Christ dealt with all the sins of the world that had ever been committed or that ever would be committed.

“Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father” (Galatians 1:4).

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (I John 2:2).

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (I John 4:10).

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Romans 3:25).

The word translated *propitiation* refers to “the means by which sins are forgiven” (Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). Paul’s reference to “sins that are past” is to the sins committed before Christ’s work on the cross; it does not mean the blood of Christ cleanses us only from the sins we commit before we come to Him in faith, leaving us to deal with subsequent sins on our own.

Third, those who believe and obey the gospel are saved. Saving faith is not seen in mere mental assent, but in active obedience. (See II Thessalonians 1:8.)

Fourth, though the salvation of those who continue to believe (“keep in memory”) the gospel is secure, salvation can be lost by those who do not continue to believe. Their faith will have been in vain. They once put their faith in Jesus for salvation, but they have now rejected Him.

To the extent that we embrace the good news of the gospel, we will sense the security of our salvation. But if we think assurance of salvation depends on anything other than Christ’s work on our behalf, we will experience questions about our salvation.

I. SECURITY THROUGH DIVINE STRUCTURE

Salvation is described in Scripture as a past, present, and future condition.

“Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Romans 5:9–10).

“For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” (Romans 8:24).

“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)” (Ephesians 2:5).

The tense of the word translated “we are saved” (sozo) in Romans 8:24 indicates this is something that occurred in the past at a specific point in time. This would be more accurately translated “we were saved,” and this is how it is rendered in various translations. For example, *Young’s Literal Translation* and the *New Living Translation* both render it “we were saved.”

To assure that not only have we been saved in the past but that we remain saved in the present, God has placed in His church certain gifts to help believers mature spiritually so they will not be moved from their salvation.

A. Authority Structure in the New Testament Church

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:28–30).

In his final words to the Ephesian elders, Paul reminded them they were overseers of the church. The word translated *overseers* is found also in I Timothy 3:1–2 and Titus 1:7 in reference to pastors, where it is translated *bishop*. The word is *episkopos*, and it refers to “one who has the responsibility of caring for spiritual concerns.” Its range of meaning includes “one responsible for, one who cares for, guardian, keeper” (Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). This speaks of the need for those whose responsibility is to help bring believers to spiritual maturity and to protect them from the influence of any who would draw them away from Christ. This is one of the primary ministries of the church.

Christ is the head of the church. “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:22).

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:18).

“And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Colossians 2:19).

Security of salvation occurs in the context of the church. The church is Christ’s body. Although the word *body* is a metaphor in this context, it describes the oneness and unity of all believers. The term is used in the New Testament to describe the role of each saved person to other members of Christ’s body. (See Romans 12:4–5; I Corinthians 12:12–31.)

There is no suggestion in the New Testament that it is spiritually safe to adopt a “Me and Jesus” attitude in regard to salvation. A popular song in the early 1970s that included this phrase in its title also expressed no need for “fancy preachin’” or a “fancy church.” But to abandon a living relationship with Christ and His body is to endanger one’s eternal salvation. Salvation places us in the body of Christ, which inherently includes relationship not only to Christ but also to one another. To live as though we can be related to Christ but not to other believers is to deny the nature of Christ’s body. (See I Corinthians 12:12–14.)

Individuals are commissioned to lead. Individual members of the body of Christ are gifted to perform specific relational functions, just as the individual parts of the human body perform relational functions with one another. Gifts are identified in Romans 12:4–8 and the spiritual gifts of I Corinthians 12–14.

But another group of gifts is described in Ephesians 4:7–11. These relate to people who are gifted to fulfill specific leadership roles in the church, and they include apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). These gifts are persons God has enabled to equip the saints “for the work of the ministry [service], for the edifying [building up and strengthening] of the body of

Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12–13).

Paul also included some of these gifts in an extended list with a variety of spiritual gifts.

“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (I Corinthians 12:28).

The gifts of Ephesians 4:11 are often described as the five-fold ministry. But because of the structure of the Greek text, some refer to them as the four-fold ministry, with the fourth person on the list being both a pastor and teacher. In this case, it does not mean all teachers are pastors, but that pastors are also teachers. (See I Corinthians 12:28–29; James 3:1; I Timothy 3:2.)

- **Apostles.** The English word *apostle* comes from a Greek word related to the verb *apostellō*, which has to do with sending. The twelve apostles were sent on a mission. In order to equip them for their mission, Jesus “gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease” (Matthew 10:1). That is, He gave them the power or authority to do the things He had been doing. Their power was not limited to casting out demons and healing the sick, for Jesus told them not only to heal the sick and cast out demons, but also to cleanse the lepers and to raise the dead (Matthew 10:8).

The power given to the twelve was not something they had earned or deserved. It was a free gift. Jesus said, “Freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). Just as they had received this authority independent of any personal merit, so they were to minister it to others regardless of personal merit. Miracles are never contingent on personal merit; they are always gifts of God. By definition, a gift is free.

But these twelve are not the only apostles mentioned in the New Testament. Judas was replaced by Matthias. (See Acts 1:15–26.) These make up the “twelve apostles of the Lamb,” whose names are written on the

twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14). There are, however, others who are identified as apostles. These include Barnabas and Paul (Acts 14:14; I Corinthians 15:9), Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7), James the Lord’s brother (Galatians 1:19), and an unnamed and unnumbered group (I Corinthians 15:7).

There is no reason to think we have no apostles today. Although the twelve apostles were a special group, the apostolic ministry is needed as long as the church is on earth. (See Ephesians 4:12–13.) Due to emotional attachments to the concept of apostleship, there is no need to identify today’s apostles; their ministry will speak for itself. We can keep in mind, however, that Paul described “the signs of an apostle” as “signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (II Corinthians 12:12). Apostolic ministry is not limited to these signs. Paul, an apostle, “strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation” (Romans 15:20). It may be that one characteristic of an apostle is to preach the gospel where it has never before been preached, with accompanying signs, wonders, and mighty deeds.

- **Prophets.** By definition, a prophet is a spokesman for God. This function is seen in Aaron’s role as Moses’ prophet (Exodus 7:1). The role of the prophet was active in the first-century church. A prophet named Agabus is identified in Acts 11:28 and also mentioned in Acts 21:10–11. Paul gave instructions as to how prophets should exercise their gifts in I Corinthians 14:29–32.

- **Evangelists.** An evangelist is one who brings good tidings or one who announces the gospel. Often evangelists are itinerant, or travel from place to place. In a larger sense, anyone who proclaims the good news of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection is functioning as an evangelist. Although Paul urged Timothy to take responsibility for the church in Ephesus, he later commanded him to do the work of an evangelist. (See I Timothy 1:3; II Timothy 4:5.)

- **Pastors.** In Ephesians 4:11, a form of the Greek *poimēn* is translated “pastors.” The word refers to herdsmen or shepherds. Forms of the same word are translated “feed” and “flock” in I Peter 5:2.

The close connection of the word “elders” in I Peter 5:1 with the words “feed” and “flock,” and the association of these terms with “pastors” in Ephesians suggests these terms were interchangeable for the first-century church. (See I Timothy 3:1–7 with Titus 1:5–9; Acts 20:17, 28.)

- Teachers. *Didaskalos*, translated “masters” in James 3:1, refers to teachers. The use of “masters” in the King James Version reflects the older use of the term in education. For example, many teachers must earn a “master’s” degree in their discipline. More recent translations typically render *didaskalos* as “teachers.”

The sobering responsibility of teachers is seen in James’s use of the word: “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (James 3:1). The point of James’s warning is even more clearly understood in this translation: “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1, NKJV). In other words, those who teach others, telling them how to live and what they must do to prepare for eternity, bear a greater responsibility than those who do not fill this role.

It is in this context that James warns of the dangers of the tongue. (See James 3:1–12.) Still referring to teachers, James concluded his warning with these words: “Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13). Not only must a teacher use words carefully; he or she must also have a God-honoring lifestyle: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13, NKJV).

B. Results and Benefits of Authority

God has instituted structures of authority for the benefit of humanity. This is true in every area of relationships, including the home, church, and civil government. (See Ephesians 6:1–9; Romans 13:1–7.) As it relates to the church, the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12).

Perfecting saints. The word translated “perfecting” is a different word than is often used elsewhere in the New Testament in reference to perfection. *Katartismos*, used here, refers to being completely adequate or capable for something. Some translations render it “equipping.” That is, God has given these gifts to the church to equip believers to do the work of ministry. This occurs as people hear, believe, and act on the biblically based words of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. There is no “self-made man” in the church. Each of us needs these gifts to bring us to a place of being qualified for the work God has given us to do.

Work of the ministry. The ministry referred to here is not necessarily preaching. It is serving according to our giftedness. Paul described this work in Romans 12:4–8:

“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Edifying the body of Christ. When believers use the gifts for which they have been equipped, the body of Christ—the church—is edified. This means the church is strengthened and built up. (See I Corinthians 14:12; II Corinthians 13:10.) In view of the possibility of the abuse of gifts, as seen in the church in Corinth, it is important to follow the counsel found in I Corinthians 12–14. The use of gifts in immature ways can be counterproductive. This does not mean it is safer to avoid the use of believers’ gifts; God has given them for a purpose, and nothing else will fill the void left by unused gifts.

Unity of faith. The unity of faith describes a point at which all believe “in one and the same way” (Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the*

New Testament). This is the goal, but it is not a static target. The Great Commission requires an ongoing effort of teaching to continually disciple those who are added to the church.

The unity of the faith requires accurate knowledge of the Son of God, growth in spiritual maturity, and conformity to the image of Christ. Here the word translated “perfect” (*teleios*) refers to maturity. The idea of being conformed to the image of Christ is in harmony with Paul’s identification of the purpose for which we are called. (See Romans 8:29.)

Those who have come to the unity of the faith will have reached a level of maturity that will enable them to avoid doctrinal instability.

Spiritual maturity. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

Spiritual maturity involves content (truth) and the greatest of virtues (love). (See I Corinthians 13:13.) This growth is not information only; it is growth into the person of Jesus Christ.

Safety and security in Christ. “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16).

Those who reach this place of maturity are, like the human body, “fitly joined together.” The words used here to describe this state of spiritual existence focus on the security of one’s identity with and placement in the body: “compacted,” “every joint,” “every part.” This kind of maturity results in the spiritual health and growth of the church.

II. SECURITY THROUGH HIS ABIDING PRESENCE

A. We Abide under the Shadow of the Almighty

The poetic imagery of Psalm 91 portrays the manner in which God gives us strength and direction for life. This is seen most notably in the way this psalm refers to the Messiah and Satan’s attempt to use this text to misdirect Jesus at the conclusion of His forty-day fast. (See Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10–11.) Satan quoted Psalm 91:11–12 in an attempt to convince

Jesus to test God’s promise. A comparison of Psalm 91:13 with Genesis 3:15 connects these verses with the promise of the Messiah’s victory over Satan. Jesus knew Satan was attempting to convince Him to misapply this promise, and He rejected the temptation.

It may seem strange to think Satan would use Scripture in his effort to deceive us. But if we do not understand Scripture, it could be a strong tool in his hand. It is important for us to correctly interpret Scripture. If we do, it will strengthen us and provide right direction. (See II Timothy 2:15.)

B. God Is Our Refuge and Fortress

“I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust” (Psalm 91:2).

The word *faith* rarely appears in the translations of the Old Testament. In the King James Version, it is seen only twice: in Deuteronomy 32:20 and Habakkuk 2:4. Does this mean there were few people of faith during that era? No, for Hebrews 11 repeatedly identifies people of faith, beginning with Abel and reaching into the intertestamental period. But in the Old Testament, the word *trust* is used to describe these people. Genuine faith is trust in God regardless of the circumstances of life. When we trust God, He protects us, and we can know we are safe in Him.

C. God Is Able to Keep Us from Falling

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24).

Believers are responsible to respond to the grace of God and to live so as to keep themselves in the love of God. But only God is able to preserve us. Even the ability to believe is a gift of God. (See Acts 11:18.) We cannot blame God for the loss of salvation. He is able to keep believers from falling. (See John 10:28–29; Romans 14:4; II Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25; I Peter 1:5.) Those who fall will be those who reject Jesus Christ.

Although believers are always to conform more closely to the character of Christ, their faultlessness, as they stand before God, will not be due to their ability to live without sin. It will be due to the cleansing effect of the blood of Jesus (Ephesians 5:26–27; Colossians 1:21–23; Hebrews 10:10, 14, 16–17) and to the imputation of His righteousness to their accounts (Romans 4:11, 23–24).

D. The Comforter Abides Forever

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16).

When the Holy Spirit comes to us, as on the Day of Pentecost, He does not come to leave. (See Hebrews 13:5.) People who have known salvation can be lost, but this will not be because God has given up on them. It will be only because they have given up on God and rejected the work of the Cross. This is seen in Hebrews 6:4–6:

“For it is impossible . . . if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”

The phrase “seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” revolves around two present active participles that mean “while they go on crucifying . . . and putting to shame.” In other words, as long as these people go on in

their apostasy, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. Though it is unspoken, the implication is that if they turned from their apostasy, their repentance would no longer be impossible.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Are you secure in your salvation? For those who are certain they are saved, there is the “blessed hope,” which is “the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). Those who are not certain of their salvation tend to experience “fear of death,” a condition that leaves them “subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15).

Many people experience doubts about their salvation at some point after being born again. In most cases this is because they think salvation is conditioned upon their perfect behavior. If this were the case, no one would ever be saved. It is certainly our goal to avoid sin, but like all Scripture, I John is our book, for it is written to believers. (See I John 1:8–10.)

It was John’s hope that his readers would not sin, but he recognized they probably would. The probable future condition of the Greek text expresses this. They probably would sin, although John did not wish for them to do so. But if they did, their salvation could be retained so long as they did not reject the work of Jesus Christ on their behalf.

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (I John 2:1).

REFLECTIONS

- If you have ever had uncertainty about your salvation, compare your experience to that of Andrew D. Urshan.
- Discuss the biblical evidence for certainty about salvation. Do not limit this to the new birth; include biblical evidence that follows the new birth.
 - How does God use the structure of the church to secure the salvation of believers?
 - When Satan tempted Jesus, how did he misuse a messianic prophecy, and how did Jesus respond?
 - Some think Hebrews 6:6 teaches it is impossible for people to be saved if they backslide. How do we know this is not true?
 - Explain how I John 2:1 points out that believers will probably sin after being saved.