

The Assurance of The Gospel and The Law

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Preface

The document you are reading is a declarative summary of the main points contained in the document by the same author, titled, "Rightly Proclaiming the Gospel and Rightly Dividing the Laws for the Assurance of Salvation." As such, it does not attempt to explain or prove what it confesses in great depth. For that, the reader must look to the full, original document and the references it cites. If you have questions or concerns about the Scriptural validity of this confession, please read that document first. If you then still have questions or concerns, please communicate them in Christian love to the author.

What we believe, teach, and confess must conform to God's Word. To Him be all glory forever, amen.

The Gospel

The gospel in God's Word is the story of two kingdoms:

- **The Domain of Darkness:** The domain of the devil, the prince of this world, and all those who follow him in rebellion. Members of this domain will burn eternally under God's judgment.
- **The Kingdom of God:** The kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord, who has redeemed us, that is, paid our debts and purchased us to be His own. Citizens of His kingdom are fellow heirs with Christ of God's eternal goodness and life. Christ's kingdom is not of this world, but will be manifest at His return.

Citizens of God's kingdom benefit by being raised on the last day (1 Cor 15), but also by God's presence with them now (Lk 17:21, Rom 14:17), and by life with Him immediately when they die (Lk 23:43, 2 Cor 5:8, Phil 1:21). This is the reason Christ's death and resurrection is good news. Christians inherit God's eternal grace and kingdom rather than judgment, and under Christ all evil will be purged (Mt 13:40-43, 1 Cor 15:24-26).

In more detail, the New Testament good news tells:

- Of the fulfillment of God's promise to the Jewish fathers (Acts 13:32)
 - That the Davidic King will crush the serpent's head and restore peace between God and man and whose kingdom will have no end.
- Of the name/person of Jesus the Christ (Acts 5:42, 8:12; Phil 1:12-17)
 - Identifying Him as the King and Son of God who fulfills the Old Testament promises and who is the true Lord of heaven and earth.
- Of the grace of God (Acts 20:24) and of salvation (Rom 1:16, Eph 1:13)
 - That Jesus' death and resurrection as our incarnate Lord wins us life and citizenship in God's kingdom. By this He purchases (redeems) us. He pays our debt that we cannot repay.
- Of peace (Acts 10:36, Eph 2:17)
 - That Jesus restores our union with God that was severed by humanity's fall into sin, and that His kingship and His promised triumphant return further means peace from our warfare against the devil, the world, and our sinful nature.
- That the law is not for the righteous but for the rebellious (1 Tm 1:8-11)
 - That citizenship in Christ's kingdom means we are freed from slavery to the demands of the letter of the law and free to live maturely in accord with the Father's will.

- Of judgment through Jesus Christ (Rom 2:16, Rv 14:6-7)
 - That Jesus destroys the works of the devil by freeing us from bondage to him and ultimately by destroying him and his servants on the final day of judgment.
- Of our hope laid up in heaven (Col 1:5)
 - That we have an inheritance of God's eternal dwelling and kingdom, the new heavens and the new earth, where the devil and his works are completely removed and our warfare will be ended.

By the faith that follows and clings to Christ Jesus, we are brought out of the domain of darkness and made members of His kingdom, and we shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). The good news is that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn 3:8), has triumphed, and His kingdom is now ours by adoption into His family (Gal 4:4-7). He is the true prince of peace (Is 9:6-7). We confess that He is the Christ, the Anointed One, our Lord and God, the one with the highest authority over all things (Jn 11:27, Eph 1:19-23).

The Faith

Does “faith” or “belief” (Greek word *pistis*) mean simply mental assent that something is true? Does “faith” mean “trust”? A better definition in modern English would be “hopeful and loyal clinging”.

Faith is defined in (Heb 10:38-11:1,6) as simultaneously the opposite of shrinking back and as that which comes to God with the assurance of reward. In the Greek Old Testament, the same word is used to describe devoting or attaching oneself to serve and support something else, such as to an externally-defined role (e.g. staying at one's post in 2 Chr 34:12) or to selflessly support another within a covenantal relationship (e.g. God providing salvation and wisdom to His people in Is 33:6). In the context of the Roman Empire of Jesus' day, the word could be used to refer to how a conquered people could unconditionally give themselves over in loyalty to Caesar in order to obtain benevolent treatment rather than punishment or destruction, as well as to the protection offered by Caesar to his subjects (cf. Eph 4:8). More generally it could be used for household or community loyalty or trustworthiness within the bonds or covenants that bound people together (cf. Gal 5:22). One might perhaps describe “faith” as a word for the way one organ in the body is interconnected with another to not only serve it but to even be defined by that interconnection. Or, in keeping with Christ's teaching, *pistis* is a word for the default bond between an infant and his parents: the parents are devoted to serving the child, and the child conforms to that devotion by learning from their image, trusting them, seeking to please them, and looking to them as his source for good.

These uses come together to give the united meaning of “**a heart that shamelessly clings to and loyally presses toward its object, to conform to its service.**” Abraham is the chief Biblical example of this faith (Rom 4:1-22, Gal 3:5-9, Heb 11:8-10, 17-19; Jas 2:21-23). He was faithful even to the point of being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac: he conformed to God's command with the hope and trust that God would even restore his son. His shameless hope in God as a rewarder of those who seek Him and follow Him dominated any motive to shrink back.

The Christian Faith then is the heart that gives its loyalty to and presses toward Christ and the hope of life with Him. Where “trust” generally describes a passive acceptance of the fidelity of someone else, “faith” is the state of being that clings in fidelity to another.

The Law

The word “law” in the Scriptures is substantially different from how we typically hear the word in English. Though scholars still debate the precise meaning of the Greek word for “law” (*nomos*), a simple sense that is consistent with the various uses found both in and outside of Scripture is **an assigned bond or instruction by which a head leads its body**. A “law” in this sense is not merely an external force or written demand, but it is the system through which a mind directs reasoning and actions. A government uses political law to direct corporate life, a community uses the law of local custom to order local life, and a man’s mind uses inner law to define his understanding and direct his own life. To be severed from law is to be severed from ordered thought.

To God’s people after Moses and before the Christ, the Law of Moses was *the* ordered thought by which God led His people; it was simply “*the* law”. In that context, additional words are needed only when one needs to refer to a law given by a different head (the law of sin) or to the new way in which the same God leads after the advent of Jesus as the redeeming King (the law of Christ).

The Three Laws

There is one law that rebels against God’s law:

- **The Law of Sin:** The bond of our selfish, sinful, rebellious nature, following the will of the devil. This law drives a person to pursue pleasure, pride, independence, and self-destruction. (See Rom 7:23, 8:2.)

However, with respect to laws from God that are to rule His people, Christ’s apostles distinguish between two laws. Both reflect God’s will and nature, but each leads mankind and binds us to God differently:

- ✚ **The Law of Ordinances:** The bond of God’s demands and teachings for mankind’s behavior of body and mind prior to Christ. This law reflects God’s will but also condemns a person to death for transgressing its external demands.
 - This label is taken from Eph 2:13,15.
 - It is often also referred to with “**law of Moses**” (1 Cor 9:9).
 - The Law of Ordinances condemned Adam and his descendents to death before Moses, but the Law of Moses subsumed and increased this same law (Rom 5:12-14,20).
- ✚ **The Law of the Spirit:** The bond of free responsibility under Christ in faith to Him to pursue His will of love by His Spirit as adopted sons and as stewards of His house. This law does not condemn a person for individual failures in perfectly executing love, but it does condemn anyone who abandons faith, that is, anyone who intentionally rebels, shirks his duty, or otherwise refuses to be ruled by the Spirit.
 - This label is taken from Rom 8:2 in combination with the passages that command those in Christ to be ruled by the Spirit (such as Gal 5:16-25).
 - This Law is also referred to as the “**law of Christ**” (Gal 6:2).
 - It is also referred to as the “**law of my mind**”,¹ (Rom 7:23).
 - It is also referred to as the “**law of liberty**” (Jas 2:12, see also 2 Cor 3:17).
 - It is also referred to as the “**law of faith**” (Rom 3:27).
 - The Law of the Spirit is often not explicitly called a law when the term “law” is reserved to refer to the Law of Ordinances. Nevertheless, the rule of the Spirit is still called a law as noted above.

¹ More specifically, the law of Paul’s mind is that by which he rules his self, which is defined by the Spirit of Christ in him.

The Law of Ordinances rules from outside of its subjects, as a tutor over children who do not understand the spirit of the law (Gal 3:23-29), particularly those who are inwardly ruled by the Law of Sin (1 Tm 1:9). But for those who are made alive in Christ, the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus replaces both the Law of Sin in inward rule (Rom 7:4-6, Rom 8:2-4, Col 3:5-8) and the Law of Ordinances in outward rule (Col 2:14, 2 Cor 3, Jas 2:12, Mt 24:45-51).

This is not a distinction purely of “letter of the law” vs “spirit of the law.” Though the Law of Ordinances is an external bond, and it requires external obedience (Mt 23:23-26), its foremost commands are matters of the heart (Ex 20:17, Mt 22:36-40, Rom 2:25-29, see also Lk 6:2-4). God demanded obedience in both heart and works to the spirit of the Law of Ordinances. But the Law of Ordinances is not of faith, but of works (Gal 3:11-12).

Paul explains in greater detail in Romans (esp. chapters 3 and 6-7) that we are born under the authority of the Law of Ordinances, are guilty of death by it because we all instead obey the Law of Sin as slaves to sin, but that through baptism into Christ we die to the external authority of the Law of Ordinances and to slavery to sin so that we might instead be slaves of righteousness in loyalty to Christ our Lord. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death” (Rom 8:2).

The transfer from slavery under the Law of Sin and the Law of Ordinances to be free under the Law of the Spirit in Christ directly corresponds with the gospel transfer of a person from slavery under the **Domain of Darkness** to citizenship in the **Kingdom of God** through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Salvation Apart from Works

What does it mean to be saved? It is to be delivered from the death sentence that we earn by breaking the Law of Ordinances and to be reborn to eternal life in the kingdom of God as fellow heirs with Christ. This is the gospel, as described earlier. We are saved when made children of God now (1 Pt 3:21) and again when we finally reach our hoped-for rest with God (Rom 13:11).

As Paul writes in Gal 3:21-22, righteousness before God cannot be earned by works of any externally given law. Even earthly laws do not impart life; they only create constraints for the sake of order and they establish punishments for people who transgress that order. Even if we were to perfectly keep the Law of Ordinances from today onward, we would not earn anything, but we would only be doing our duty, that which we should have been doing in the first place (Lk 17:7-10; see also Rom 4:4-8, 2 Tm 1:9, Eph 2:8-10). Thus, doing what we ought to cannot make our debts go away; it only avoids additional debt. We cannot pay our debts to God, for “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). And we all have earned this debt, for “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (1 Jn 1:10).

Jesus freed us from our debts under the Law of Ordinances by grace as a gift (Col 2:13-14, Eph 2:14-15, Phil 3:8-11, 2 Tm 1:10, Mt 18:23-27). After God transfers us freely into His kingdom through faith in Christ, no amount of our works can then do anything to earn that transfer. The transfer is already made. Once the transfer is made, we pursue works of love according to the Law of the Spirit because we are sons of God in Spirit and truth. We do not perform these works out of obligation to any Law of Ordinances. We “owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law” (Rom 13:8).

But it should be noted that, while we do not earn the kingdom of God through our works, doing well with the liberty given to us as members of the kingdom is rewarded (1 Cor 3:13-15, Lk 19:16-19, Dn 12:1-3, Mt 19:27-30). This reward is not the gift of our salvation; it is a reward within the gifted kingdom.

Two Paths of Judgment

To reject God's law is to break one's bond with Him—to be severed from God. There are two ways by which a person can be condemned and left outside the Christ's inheritance:

1. Remaining under the **Domain of Darkness**. This judgment is for those who refuse the call of Jesus Christ or who never hear it. These remain in slavery and condemnation under the Law of Ordinances.
2. After being called into the **Kingdom of God**, refusing to be ruled by the Law of the Spirit. This judgment is for those who have been baptized into the name of Christ Jesus but then willfully obey the Law of Sin despite a knowledge of the truth of God's will. These rebel against God in intentional, unrepentant sin, whether by willful sins of commission or by willfully shirking duty with sins of omission.

Paul notes the chief illustration of this reality given through Israel's history: they were redeemed from the slavery of Egypt; they were, by grace, made heirs of the promised land through baptism into a kingdom of God's people in communion with Christ; and yet many still died for their rebellion, not reaching that promised land (1 Cor 10:1-12). That is, there was judgment for the people of Egypt, and there was also judgment for the people whom God called out of Egypt but who then rebelled in the wilderness. Christ's parable of the wedding banquet (Mt 22:1-14) also especially illustrates the two paths of judgment: Those who refuse the call to the feast are destroyed and burned. Those who refuse the master's garments after following the call are cast into the outer darkness. (See also Heb 10:26-29, Eph 5:5-8, Lk 19:12-27, Mt 18:28-35, Mt 25:14-30.)

Both paths of judgment are the fruit of obeying the Law of Sin.

So while we cannot earn our transfer into the kingdom of God, we do earn any judgment that casts us out of it. We are dependent on receiving life from Christ the Vine, and when severed we must be reattached by His grace and Spirit alone. Severed rebels have no authority to command God's Spirit into their hearts. But those who are alive are capable of choosing to cut themselves off from that Vine and His Spirit.

Two Obediences

Unlike in modern English, the Greek word for "obey" (*hupakouó*—literally "under-hear") is a word closer in meaning to faith than to outward works. It is the act of listening submissively in the mind so that the mind produces works as a fruit. That is, the mind believes the word and therefore acts consistently with that word. (Hebrew does not even have a distinct word for "obey". Its word (*shama*) is simply the word for "hear".)

Paul says "you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness" (Rom 6:16). He then distinguishes between the obedience of the flesh and the obedience of the mind, stating that his service to Christ is through the law of his mind even while his flesh still serves the law of sin (Rom 7:6-25). He thus makes the distinction between serving with the flesh and with the mind.

Our flesh is and will always be a slave of sinful passions until Christ returns and resurrects us, and we cannot change that. But there are two options for obedience by our minds:

1. Submit to and serve the Law of Sin and death from your flesh,
2. Submit to and serve the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ our Lord.

This is not “Law” in the sense of external obligation. It is a question of whom one serves in the “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5, 16:26) in the law of one’s mind. You cannot serve two masters (Mt 6:24).

There remains condemnation for those who willfully obey the Law of Sin—who do not submit to the “Law of God in the inner man” (Rom 7:21), but no condemnation for those who are in Jesus (Rom 8:1-11). Obedience to Christ with our minds means that we do wrestle against the desires of the flesh and do not let them rule over us. (See Rom 6:12, Gen 4:6-7.)

This does not mean that God’s standards of perfection have diminished. Any disobedience to God, whether under the Law of Ordinances or under the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ, deserves wrath and death. Under the Law of Ordinances, though an Israelite pursued God in faith, God still required propitiation for non-willful sins in the form of animal sacrifices, and mediators in the form of priests, though these were but shadows of things to come (Heb 10:1). Under the reign of Christ, we do not receive God’s wrath for non-willful sins because Christ’s propitiating death applies once and for all time, and He is still our mediator before the Father as our great high priest (Heb 7:23-25; 9:7,14,24; 10:11-14; 1 Jn 2:1; Rom 8:31-35). Thus, the Law of the Spirit does not condemn us to death for individual transgressions or failures in our conduct as we war to rule over the desires of our flesh.

If you choose to reject the headship of Christ and to obey sin even while having a full knowledge of the truth of what you do and that by doing so you oppose God’s will, then you obey the Law of Sin in your mind and rebel against the Law of the Spirit. For this there is no atoning sacrifice (Heb 10:26). But if you can say, with Paul, that the sin you do is what you do not want (Rom 7:20), then with him you can also say that it is not you who does it but the sin dwelling in your flesh. Take heart; you have an Advocate with the Father. He will deliver you from this body of death. Come, Lord Jesus!

The Certainty of Hope

How do you know you are saved? Can a Christian on his deathbed, if asked, “Will you be raised to life everlasting and not to eternal death?” answer with a confident, “Absolutely!”?

Biblical hope does not mean a wish, as when in English one says, “I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow.” This Greek word for Christian hope (*elpis*) means confident expectation. If we cannot say with confidence on our deathbed, “I know that where Christ is, there I will be also”, then, by the Biblical definition, we have no hope. If you have no hope, how are you to be “ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pt 3:15)? (See also 1 Pt 1:3-6,21; Rom 8:20-25.)

Christ calls us to have such confidence:

- ✚ “Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.’” (Jn 11:23-27)

This same certainty is seen in the Old Testament as well (Job 19:25-27, 33:23-28; Ps 130:3-5,7-8). And we know that Old Testament Israel’s trust in God was not founded upon something they earned through keeping God’s Law, but upon God’s covenant with Abraham and his offspring, to the point even that they erroneously trusted in descent according to the flesh at the expense of sharing the faith of Abraham (Mt 3:9, Rom 9:3-8, Gal 3:17-19). But Christians do share in this promise to Abraham by sharing his faith (Gal 3:6-9).

But can a genuine Christian still doubt his ultimate inheritance because, even if he is presently faithful, he does not know whether he might fall away in the future? Only in the sense that he must not stop running the race. Paul exhorts, "Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (1 Cor 10:12). Proper humility demands that one acknowledge one's capacity to fall to temptation. Yet, as stated, Christian hope is confident expectation in our Lord. For someone to let his own weakness shake his confidence in Christ is for him to place his hope at least partially in himself rather than on Christ, just as Peter doubted as he walked toward Jesus on the sea. Peter's doubt was not because he completely forgot about Christ, but because he focused on whether the storm was stronger than his own weakness (it was), rather than on whether it was stronger than Jesus, his "way of escape" (1 Cor 10:13) from its power (it was not). Present doubt in one's future of faith is still doubt, and thus it conflicts with true hope and faith in Christ. It is a self-fulfilling fear.

Confidence in our promised inheritance as God's children is supposed to be our motivation now to endure any present hardships that would tempt us to shrink back from God (Heb 10:29-39). We are called to lay aside sin out of faith and faithfulness to Christ, our Lord, with the same expectation that Christ Himself had while enduring the cross (Heb 12:1-2). Christ knew with confidence that God would raise Him from the dead, as He often stated (e.g. Mt 16:21). If we did not share that confidence, despite our shortcomings, then we could not run the race with the same assurance of joy set before us.

The Endurance of Faith

If faith is the assurance of things hoped for, then does a man completely lose faith if he ever wavers in faithfulness or falls into transgression, and thereby lose his grounds for confidence?

Consider Peter. After he looked away from Jesus while walking on the water, Jesus said he had "little faith" (Mt 14:30-31), notably not "no faith". Later, Jesus stated:

- ✙ "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. . . I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me." (Lk 22:31-32,34)

Jesus declared that His prayer is granted, and that Peter's faith would not fail throughout the ordeal of denying Him. This shows that Peter was able to deny Jesus without having his faith "fail".

Doubting can lead to losing the immediate object of one's hope. (By doubting, Peter began sinking and failed to reach his object on his own two feet; see also Jas 1:6-8.) Yet little faith can still be saving faith. Though Peter forgot his assurance in Christ in the moment that he was tempted by the fear of the storm and again by the fear of Christ's accusers when he denied Him three times, his faith did not totally fail and die, as Christ said it would not. When each moment passed and Peter came to himself, he still pressed toward Christ as his hope (Mt 14:30-31, Jn 21:7).

Faith does not exist because of its performance, but through the clinging of the heart to its object, which thereby strives for faithful performance. Living faith is that which, upon realizing that one has strayed, shamelessly returns again in contrite submission and renewed hope. Faith dies when repentance dies.

For the Christian who is under the "law of faith" (Rom 3:27), since "sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn 3:4), "all things are lawful" (1 Cor 6:12) with respect to works, but "whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom 14:23). Even momentary lapses in faith are sins, and "we all stumble in many ways" (Jas 3:2), for "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is

weak” (Mt 26:41). We all have thereby sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). But “if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 Jn 2:1-2).

The important distinction is between willful lawlessness of the mind and unwillful sin committed in ignorance. God’s atoning sacrifices are for sins “committed in ignorance” (Heb 9:6-7, 11-14; cf. Lv 4:2, 22, 27; 5:14, 18). “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (Heb 10:26). Willful sin is unrepentant sin. A Christian can sin in ignorance by unintentionally lapsing in faith. He will continue to cling to Christ, and when made aware of his sin he will repent. The testing of our faith makes it stronger and produces endurance against opposing temptations (Jas 1:2-3, Rom 5:3-5). But a man cannot choose wilful, unrepentant sin and still bear the Spirit of life in Christ.

So saving faith is not a faithfulness that never stumbles. It is a faithfulness that always repents and returns to God when it does stumble. The only sin that fully kills faith and severs us from Christ is that which willfully refuses rule by the Spirit. We must cling to Christ and the full assurance of our inheritance in Him. Christ Himself atoned for our sins by His blood so that we can repent and approach God with confidence despite our shortcomings and stumblings. Our faith is the picture of looking with confidence to the Son of Man lifted up as the serpent in the wilderness, even while we are presently being justly bitten by serpents, and saying, “Lord, save me! Come, Lord Jesus!”

The Test of Love

God is love (1 Jn 4:8), and because faith in God by definition clings to and conforms to Him and does not willfully and unrepentantly sin against Him, a faithful child of God is obvious by his fruits of love (Mt 7:16-20). A man who only says the words, “Lord, Lord” but does not submit to Christ as his Lord in spirit and truth does not have this faith (Mt 7:21-23; see also Jn 5:28-29). He is a hypocrite who still obeys unrighteousness and the Law of Sin with his mind, and he will be assigned a place with the hypocrites (Mt 24:48-51, Rom 2:4-8, Ti 1:16).

Under the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ, God’s command is simply to believe in Jesus and to love one another (1 Jn 3:23). Since we know that we should love, if we knowingly refuse to do so, then we must have a guilty conscience, and a persistent guilty conscience must shrink back to destruction at His coming (1 Jn 2:28, Heb 10:38). That God commands those who have life in Him to love does not mean that we earn that life by our love. It does mean that willful refusal to love according to God’s command and Spirit refuses both faith and that gift of life. The heart of true faith loyally pursues faithfulness and fights against the Law of Sin in the flesh. Because “every good tree bears good fruit” (Mt 7:17), and because the fruits of mature love are objective and obvious, bearing fruit does indeed give the Christian confidence before God that he is His child (1 Jn 3:14-22).

But love is also something that is taught and learned through faith (Eph 5:1-2, 2 Cor 6:11-13, Ti 2:3-7). If this were not so, the apostles would not need to write to the churches to teach and exhort them to love, as they do within most of the epistles. Some Christians will bear more fruit than others due to having matured further from little children in the faith into the full image of Christ. Those who have matured in love are those who “know the Father”, while those who have not are still children (see 1 Jn 1:10-2:1, 3, 12-13). A child cannot know his father’s will unless he is taught. A faithful child will strive to conform to the image of his father’s instruction. A child who clings to lawlessness will shrink back from his parent’s gaze.

If a man has faith in God but also serves the lusts of his flesh not out of overt rebellion but out of ignorance to what God’s Way is, he is like an infant or like a sheep without a shepherd. The mature Christians, out of love

for serving their Lord and out of love for the man, that he may not earn punishment in his ignorance (see Lk 12:47-48), are to go and show him what God demands from His Word. If he has faith in Jesus as his Lord then the law of his mind will conform to the law of God, and he will then strive to conform his willful behavior accordingly, though that must involve battling against sin in his flesh. This process of maturing in love is our sanctification. Only after a person is confronted with his sin in private, and before witnesses, and before the church, and then still willfully rejects Christ's authority, should Christians treat him as someone who is outside of Christ's body and outside of His certain hope of resurrection (see Mt 18:15-20).

If a man finds that he has failed in any way to love God or his neighbor as he ought and as he strives to, that does not mean that he has chosen to wilfully cast off the Law of the Spirit in rebellion against God. The striving shows that he is in fact fighting the Law of Sin with his mind, according to the Law of the Spirit of Christ. "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him" (Lk 17:4). We know from human experience that our thoughts follow habits that are often inconsistent, and these can be hard to rule over through the Spirit. We pray to be forgiven as we ourselves forgive (Mt 6:12-15).

There is no confidence before God for a man who knows that he is choosing to disregard God's will. There is confidence for any child of God, no matter how young or untaught, who toddles toward Him in faith. As he pursues Christ, he will increase in maturity, in love, and in knowledge in His Way and will bear more fruit. Since God continues to teach us, we maintain this confidence by continuing to listen to Him in faith. Even if our heart condemns us, we "will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him", "for God is greater than our heart and knows all things." (1 Jn 3:19-20)

A man cannot be reassured that he has God's Spirit by being reminded that Christ died for the sins of the world. A man burdened by his sins cannot be reassured that he has not blasphemed the Spirit and cast God off by being reminded that he was previously given the Spirit. Rather, a man who is burdened by knowledge of his sinfulness and who stills pursues God should be reminded of the distinction between faith that stumbles and faith that fails, and of the distinction between the law of his mind and the law of his flesh, and that he can see objectively that he does pursue God's will as he struggles against his sinful flesh. He should especially be reminded that "if we are faithless, He remains faithful" (2 Tm 2:13).

But if any man looks to his own fruits, not as a measure of whether he is faithfully listening to his Lord but of whether he has merited enough to earn or sustain life from God, he poisons faith in God with faith in himself and seeks to be justified by law, which severs him from Christ (Gal 5:4). He must then either doubt his future, for he will never be able to meet God's standard of perfection in his works, or fall into blind conceit and the judgment of the devil (Jn 9:41, 1 Tm 3:6). And if any man regards his fruits without recognizing his guilt and need for continual intercession, the truth is not in him (1 Jn 1:8) and his guilt remains (Lk 18:11-14).

Legitimacy Doubts

Paul says, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:8-11,13). There are then two ways that a person can legitimately doubt that he will be saved. Only if either of these is true for a man can he conclude that he has rejected his Lord and will not be saved:

1. He does not confess Jesus as his Lord (he rejects the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ),
2. He does not believe in his heart that God raised Jesus from the dead (he rejects the Gospel).

Regarding the first, it is obvious when one does not truly submit to Jesus as Lord, for even if he claims on the surface to follow Him, such a person openly chooses to reject His Word once he acknowledges that it says something he disagrees with. He instead confesses allegiance of his mind and spirit to the Law of Sin. This lack of loyalty to Christ is incompatible with the Christian faith.

Regarding the second, it is also obvious when one rejects that God raised Jesus and will raise His church from the dead. These are typically those who outwardly identify as belonging to other religions or as atheists, though there have been those who openly reject the real resurrection while calling themselves Christians. This refusal to recognize the living reign and rewards of Christ is incompatible with the faith that clings in hope to Christ.

Summary

- ✚ “Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.” (1 Jn 2:28)

There are two paths of judgment: one for those who do not receive the gospel, and thus are not transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God, and one for those who are not willing to receive the law, and thus, though they have been transferred, they then rebel against God in our present wilderness.

Thus, for true confidence before God that does not shrink away from Him at His coming, a man must have:

1. Confidence that he has been transferred into the kingdom of God,
2. Confidence that he is not rebellious and that God still receives him.

A person's confidence according to the gospel is that he has been transferred into the kingdom of God, and this must be solely in the gift and love of God, and not in his own works. If a person wrestles with doubt as to whether God's mercy is for him, due to how undeserving he is, then that person should be reminded that his transfer depended not on his own merits but on God's mercy, to God's glory.

A person's confidence according to the law of the Spirit, that God still receives him throughout life after his transfer, depends on both God's forgiveness and on his objective life in the Spirit that God gives. A tree is known by its fruits. If he doubts whether he has forsaken Christ, pointing him back to confidence in his initial transfer will not address his uncertainty. He must be reminded of the meaning of faith and law, and that he is in the Spirit when the law of his mind pursues God's law even as it fights sin. Faith leads him to continually mourn his sin and repent and pursue maturity in God's image. Confidence that God still welcomes him must be rooted in the assurance that Christ still intercedes for him and cleanses him from his sins even after his adoption.

In common with both assurances is the remembrance of God's steadfast love for us that both creates and sustains our forgiven life in Him. He is “the author and perfecter of faith” (Heb 12:2). To Him be all glory, amen.

If a Christian can say, with Paul, that Jesus is his Lord, according to the law of his mind, and believes, with Paul, that God raised Jesus up from the dead, he too will be saved and raised to be with Him in paradise.

The good news is that God's Anointed, Jesus our Lord, has come, has died to pay our debts, has been raised to eternal life to bring into His eternal kingdom with Him all those who are united to Him through faith, has defeated the prince of this world, and will on the last day cast out all evil. He has freed us from the penalties of God's ordinances so that in this faith and grace in which we stand we may freely and confidently bear fruit for Him in love. Our confidence is through faith with hope with love.

- ✦ “Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Cor 3:4-6)

This confidence is the object and goal of the proclamation of the gospel and the dividing of the laws.