How can I be sure of my salvation?
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There are two important tests in Scripture for a person to determine whether or not he or she is a true believer.

There is first of all an objective test, which asks, "Do I believe?" Ask yourself if you affirm the Scripture's record of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Do you believe that He is God manifest in the flesh? Do you believe that God saves sinners solely through the merits of Jesus Christ's obedient life and substitutionary death on the cross?

Second is the subjective or experiential test of assurance in which you ask yourself, "Is my faith real?" The apostle John's purpose in writing the epistle of 1 John was to give true believers assurance of their salvation (1 John 5:13). In that small epistle John gives several marks to distinguish a true believer.

- True believers walk in the light (1 John 1:6-7). The light here means both intellectual and moral truth. Ask, "Do I affirm the truths of Scripture, and desire to obey them?"

- True believers confess their sin (1:8-2:1) Confess here doesn't mean to recite every wrong that we have ever done. Rather, it means to agree with God about our sin. That means that true believers hate their sin; they don't love it. They acknowledge they are sinful, and yet they know they are forgiven.

- True believers keep His commandments (2:3-4; 5:2-3). The term here refers to a watchful, observant obedience. Here the believer desires to obey truths he deems precious. It involves a proactive approach to obedience-the Christian studies Scripture in order to understand and obey it.

- True believers love the brethren (2:9-11; 3:10, 14-15; 5:2). Ask yourself the question, "Do I love God's people and desire to be around them?"

- True believers affirm sound doctrine (2:20-23; 4:2,6). John here teaches that no true believer will fall into any serious, Christ-denying error or heresy.

- True believers follow after holiness (2:29; 3:3-4, 6-9). These verses certainly aren't talking about sinless perfection, or even the frequency or duration of sin. The term sin in these verses describes one who lives an immoral, ungodly, unrighteous life as a matter of continual practice, and carries the attitude of hardened hate for God's righteousness.

- True believers have the Holy Spirit (4:13; 5:10-11). This is an over-arching test summing up all the others. Is there evidence that the fruit of the Spirit is present in your life (Galatians 5:22-23)?

In summary, one's assurance of salvation does not need to be based on a past decision or an experience. It should rest first of all on one's faith in the objective truth of God's Word, Jesus Christ, and the gospel. Secondly, it should rest on the reality of a changed life marked by obedience, a love for Christ and His righteousness, and a hatred for sin. Take heart if these things are true in your life, and trust God to continue to work out His salvation in your life.

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