

*From Fear
to
Faith*

— Matthew Allen

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by Matthew Allen

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Spiritual “equipment” for the contest of life.



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Table of Contents

Prologue	3
How Could God Love Someone Like Me?	10
God's Amazing Forgiveness	17
The Abundant Mercy Of God	24
A Deeper Appreciation For Grace	30
Justified In Christ	38
Jesus: The Offering That Turned Away God's Wrath	47
Living By Trust In Jesus, Not Ourselves	58
Walking In Newness Of Life	68
The Struggle With Flesh And Spirit	80
There Is No Condemnation For Those Who Are In Christ	88
The Power Of Hope	98
The Proper Perception On Obedience	107
Confident In Christ	119
End Notes	126

Prologue

In 2006, **Dave Roberts**, who would later become one of the shepherds in the church at Brownsburg, Indiana, inspired me to delve into a subject that has changed my life forever. That is, the need for assurance in our salvation. Too many Christians approach their spiritual life with doubt and uncertainty. They do not know for sure they are saved. They feel they will never add up or be good enough for God. They wonder if they would **really** be saved if they were to die suddenly, or if the Lord were to return. While they responded in primary obedience to the gospel years before, they now find themselves given over to doubt as to whether they remain in a saved condition.

Have I done enough?

Have I kept all of the commands?

What if I have missed something in regards to my spiritual life?

Some feel that at one moment they are in salvation, and the next moment, out of salvation. Silently, they wonder whether God can forgive them for what has gone on in their life since their salvation.

Will God be patient with me as I deal with my shortcomings, repetitive sin, and even outright failures?

I know how that feels, because it is the way I used to live. I am so thankful for my good brother and spiritual mentor who first challenged me to rethink the paradigm I had been operating from. In the fall of 2006, I preached a series of lessons on this subject, which became the basis for a Bible class and this book. The first edition of *From Fear to Faith* has been bought by believers around the world. Since 2007, I have preached the message of the hope and assurance of our salvation around the United States and beyond. The reaction has been the same wherever I go. I usually hear something like:

We need more sermons like that...

I needed to hear that, because I just worry that I'm not good enough to be saved.

This inspires me to keep on keeping on. Having moved to Ohio in 2010, once again I've been blessed to work under a group of shepherds who have encouraged me to continue this pursuit.

As you will see, I approach this subject with passion. The message of the New Testament is one of hope and grace. In his prayer for the Romans Paul said, *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope*, Romans 15.13. The apostles labored to explain our adoption as sons and daughters of God. They spoke often about the riches of our spiritual inheritance in the next life. For example:

- *For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith*, Galatians 3.26.
- *God wants to show (us) the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*, Ephesians 2.7.
- *Peter wrote of an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance, kept in heaven for you*, 1 Peter 1.3-4.
- *John testified that when we sin we have an Advocate who pleads on our behalf*, 1 John 1.7-2.3.

The Scriptures resoundingly affirm that **every** Christian can live with full assurance and trust God for their salvation. We need a healthy dose of faith in these Scriptures! God's word is true! We can trust our very soul on it. We are those who are *in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began*, Titus 1.2.

Each Christian must learn to trust, not in his or her own perfection or works to merit salvation, but in the work of God. When we sin, God stands ready to forgive. We need to learn to forgive ourselves and understand that Christianity is a process. We stand, not in our strength, but in the strength of God, Ephesians 6.10-13. Faith is a journey, not a destination. Christians must never live as if they have "arrived." No person has ever lived the Christian life perfectly and no one has things all figured out. We are to be progressing and participating in the transformation process for the rest of

our life. We must move with a spirit of humility and compassion for others, recognizing just how much God has forgiven us.

Why Is This a Problem in Today's Church?

Throughout the twentieth century, God's people rightfully defended God's truth against the false doctrine of *impossibility of apostasy*. Debate notes and long discourses about those whom we disagreed with filled our pulpits. However, there seems to have been little emphasis on God's assurance of our salvation. Please do not misunderstand. In our pulpits, there is a need for teaching that exposes false doctrine for what it is. *Calvinism* is not a biblical doctrine, primarily because it denies the freewill of mankind. We are freewill beings and have the ability to choose whom we will serve, before and after becoming a Christian. The Calvinistic doctrine of *impossibility of apostasy* denies this fact. Jesus' teaching in the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13, Mark 4), Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8), teaching in Hebrews (Hebrews 2.1-3; 10.22-39), and Peter's writing (2 Peter 2.20-22), destroys the concept of *impossibility of apostasy*. We can willfully turn our back on God, walk away, and be lost.

But, this is the **last** thing many Christians intend to do. The vast majority never set out to reject God. But, temptation will come during moments of weakness, and sometimes we sin. To this, no Christian is immune. After succumbing to sin, some may wonder:

- *Has God really forgiven me ... even if I knew better when I engaged in sin?*
- *Did God really mean it when He promised to forgive me when I repent and confess my sin?*
- *I have struggled with repetitive sin. Have I run out of chances with God?*

How Do We Address the Problem?

We must equip Christians for the transformation process. Living as the new person God created is not without its battles with the flesh. See Romans 7. When we come to God for salvation, we must allow Him to go to work in our life. This involves full surrender, Galatians 2.20. Our power for survival and success lie in Him and the strength of His word, Romans 8.13; Ephesians 6.10, 13. We must resist the idea that we must be perfect in order to get to heaven. Any expectation of a Christian coming out of the baptistry water and never falling to temptation again should be steadfastly rejected.

We need to cultivate an atmosphere of encouragement. Local churches must focus on the importance of building strong relationships within their congregation. *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near,* Hebrews 10.23-25. The focus must be on helping others along our journey toward heaven. *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another,* Romans 12.10-16.

We need to cultivate an atmosphere of transparency. Do the members of your spiritual family feel comfortable communicating their personal struggles and setbacks? *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working,* James 5.16. How comfortable does the average Christian feel in sharing their burdens, mistakes, and temptations with others? Spiritual families are not a social club for those who have it all together and all figured out, because no one does. The church is a rescue

station for sinners. God designed it to be a place of healing and safety. In some places, the weakest and most vulnerable Christians turn away too soon. This may be due to the creation of a sterile environment which leads to the impression that a person must be perfect, always able to say “no” to sin. Such places are discouraging. They make a person feel uncomfortable and intimidated.

How can I ever be good enough?

I'll never be perfect, so why try?

Congregations need to be mindful of the need for a helpful environment that recognizes the reality of fleshly weakness. We must commit to the work of helping people move away from their sin. This approach is positive and encouraging. The other is rooted in fear. A helpful environment builds up. The other tears down.

Imagine your congregation for a moment. Visualize some of the families who are present. Today, there is a good probability that there is:

- A husband who is fighting an internet pornography addiction and even though he tries with all his might, just cannot seem to kick the habit.
- A teenager who came to church today struggling with a decision on what to do about an out of wedlock pregnancy.
- A wife who is dealing with disenchantment in her marriage and herself. She is tempted to look to another man who shows interest in her and makes her happy about herself.
- A young man who is on the edge and feeling pressure to participate in the homosexual lifestyle.
- A couple who is tempted to cheat on their taxes.
- A middle aged person who feels they have made so many mistakes in life that they cannot possibly recover and be where they think they ought to be.

These are real problems being faced by real Christians everywhere. For those who struggle, an encouraging atmosphere is more conducive to spiritual growth and transformation. There is a huge difference between a message of hope, deliverance, and reliance on God's solutions to their problem and being told week after week they are not doing enough to obey God. Instead of learning about tools to help them cope with real life situations and problems, they feel surrounded by "perfect" people who have forgotten what it feels like to be so "imperfect."

Some Christians do not need to be reminded they fall short. They are very aware of their struggles. Will they receive the encouragement to wholeheartedly pursue Jesus despite their imperfections, Philippians 3.7-11? Is there an equipping for **real life** problems? Through the years, one of the saddest things I've witnessed is knowing of struggling Christians who sink further into the murky depths of despair, as others in the spiritual family turn on them, judging them for their shortcomings. There is no offer to help—it's just criticism. After so long, the weak one simply turns away. Spiritually, this is the act of "shooting our own." It is little wonder why some new converts are lost to the world.

Move with understanding that teaching on grace, forgiveness, and mercy is not advocating a soft gospel or "cheap grace." Critics often charge, *grace equals leniency*. Does it? Not at all. Grace is not a license to sin! It is our motivation **not to sin!** *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works, Titus 2.11-14.*

Grace, forgiveness, mercy, and hope are biblical topics. Just because others in the religious world tie religious error to these theological concepts, does not mean we should ignore them. I find it tragic to have found so many

Christians who know little about God's grace and live with little assurance of salvation. Many possess a flawed viewpoint of God and do not know how to relate to Him other than through the perspective of law.

In *From Fear to Faith*, it is my desire to conduct an in-depth study on the assurance of our salvation. I want to help Christians find more hope, confidence, and trust in God. We must rest not in ourselves, but in the grace of God.

The Scriptures teach that Christians **were** saved, Romans 8.24; **are being** saved, 1 Corinthians 15.2; and **shall be** saved, Romans 5.9-10. Those who live in faith will be saved, wholly, completely, and forevermore! Challenge yourself each day to take God at His word and be thankful for His adopting you as His son or daughter. *Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom, Luke 12.32.*

How Could God Love Someone Like Me?

Introduction:

You know the feeling. It starts deep down inside. As it grows the gnawing in your stomach begins and anxiety builds. What feeling? It's the realization that you've messed up ... **again**. Satan sought out your weaknesses and effectively exploited them to the fullest. And now, the guilt. The constant questioning:

If only I had ...

Then there is the dread of coming to worship services and thinking:

If these people knew half the things I struggle with, they'd toss me out of here.

Many Christians begin their new life with zealotry and an intense desire to live right. But after so long, Satan comes calling and leads them back toward the same habits they had before their relationship with Christ. Out of weakness, they succumb to temptation. Sometimes the guilt is overpowering. Satan continually works, pressing hard to convince us that it is time to throw in the towel and give up.

There's no use. I'm just not cut out for this Christianity thing ...

For countless numbers of Christians, this scenario happens all the time.

The Danger of Perfectionism and Self-Comparison

The Hebrew writer likened sin to a great weight that ties us down, Hebrews 12.1. Sin paralyzes spiritual progress and shackles us with remorse. Then, as Jesus' perfect example of holiness comes into view, things can feel even worse. When Peter finally realized the true identity of Jesus, he responded, *Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord*, Luke 5.8. There is a constant realization that **God** is holy and **we** are not.

Sometimes this burden feels overwhelming. This huge sense of despair and uncertainty must have been part of the thought process of those gathered

together on the day of Pentecost. What a powerful, passionate sermon Peter gave! With no apologies, Peter delivered the painful reality to his audience. The Jews had crucified the Son of God, Acts 2.36. His listeners urgently asked, *Brethren, what shall we do?* They understood their guilt. They were lost and needed a means to be forgiven. Acts 2.38-42 records Peter's answer. About 3000 souls were added to the church that day.

The way out of sin is through Jesus. God's great desire is to pardon the sin of all people, Acts 17.30-31. To those who have never obeyed, like those in our example in Acts 2, they must submit to the terms of God's grace. Faith is generated by hearing the gospel, Romans 10.17. Faith is simply the action of a convicted heart which responds by reaching out to God. We reach out to Him in repentance. We surrender by removing ourselves off the throne of our heart, confessing Jesus as Lord (Romans 10.9-10) and dying with Christ in the waters of baptism, Romans 6.3-6. When we sin after our baptism, we are instructed to confess our sins and seek God's forgiveness, 1 John 1.8-10. **There can be no assurance of salvation while walking in darkness.** *Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?* Luke 6.46.

Human perfection in regard to any law (Old or New) is unattainable, Romans 3.9-10; Galatians 3.21. Satan works through the weakness of the flesh to subject us to temptation. We are not always at our strongest and will give in to sin. It is a constant struggle for every Christian. Paul wrestled with his flesh, Romans 7.14-25. Satan wants our soul back. After sinning, he tells us we are no longer worthy to be a Christian and there is no use in trying anymore. It is at this point that some choose to move deeper into darkness and embrace a lifestyle of sin. **Those who believe Satan and choose to willfully engage in sin through walking in darkness will not be saved,** Galatians 6.7-8.

We can add to our problems by comparing ourselves to others. It is very easy to observe other Christians and form an inaccurate image. We perceive they are so strong that when temptation comes it is summarily dismissed. We see fellow Christians who always have a smile on their face,

are upbeat, happily married, busy in the work of the church, and know most of the answers in Bible class.

What are they doing that I'm not? Will I ever add up?

This mindset is deadly. Paul wrote, *Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding*, 2 Corinthians 10.12.

Self-comparison leads us down a road which leads to disappointment and ruin. **Everyone** struggles with sin. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, Romans 3.23. The cold, hard reality of this life is that God's sons and daughters will fall prey to sin and when we do, Jesus stands in our place, and makes propitiation for us. *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. **But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments,*** [emphasis mine] 1 John 1.8, 10; 2.1-3. Those who think they have it all together are still subject to weakness and sin.

Three Things We Can Do with Sin

I once read that there are three things we can do with sin.

- **We can resolve to never sin again.** This mentality is a setup for failure. Even though we must try, avoiding sin completely is impossible. See 1 John 1.8.
- **We can let sin make us a coward.** Think of Judas. When he realized the terrible consequences of his scheme, he went out and hanged himself, Matthew 27.3-5. He could have faced his sin through confessing it to God. God would have forgiven him. Instead, Judas listened to the lie of

darkness and now has all eternity to deal with the regret of his sin. Sin turned Judas into a coward. Don't let sin make you a coward.

- **We must learn from our sin;** since resolving to never sin again and not facing our sin are ways leading to defeat. This is the third and most profitable option. It is what Peter did. After suffering a crushing spiritual defeat by denying Jesus three times (Matthew 26.69-75) the apostle sought God's forgiveness and picked himself up, John 21.15-19. A mere fifty days after the resurrection, Peter preached the greatest sermon of his life. Over 3000 repented and were baptized. It was a stunning turnaround for a person who walked through the deepest spiritual valley only two months before.

Toward the end of his life, Peter praised God.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

— 1 Peter 1.3-4

Peter knew all about mercy and forgiveness. He personally experienced it, John 21.15-17. What was true for Peter remains true for us. Our repentance brings mercy and forgiveness from God. When God says something, He means it. We must move in faith and learn to trust Him more. When God says it's over, it's over. *Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out,* Acts 3.19. When God forgives, it is as if the sin never happened. It's been obliterated, destroyed, wiped out, never to be brought up again.

With God, It's Personal

God sent His Son to the cross to be the perfect sacrifice for sin. Jesus is our propitiation for sin, 1 John 2.2. Jesus died for everyone, Romans 15.17-19. It makes no difference how many sins have to be forgiven. No one is beyond

God's power to save. *He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them,* Hebrews 7:25. This passage makes it clear that **forgiveness is not a one-time event**. Jesus *always lives to make intercession for us*. He continues to be the offering that turns away God's wrath. We can always approach the Father, confess our sin, and be assured that He will **always** welcome us back into His grace, 1 John 1:7-9.

While we will cover this more in depth later in this book, some may wonder about sins and shortcomings they can't presently see or recognize. Every Christian is in a growing process, 2 Peter 1:5-11. Looking back at your life you may see shortcomings and sins that you committed previously that you only now have come to recognize with growth and maturity in Christ. Does this mean you were not saved then? While we must never be content with our weaknesses, we must also leave room for God's patience, grace, and mercy. Our Father understands our situation perfectly. He knows every circumstance. He knows our heart. He knows we are in the midst of a process of growth and maturation. There is no one who God wishes to be lost, 2 Peter 3:9. See what the Holy Spirit says a little later in the chapter: *Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. **And count the patience of our Lord as salvation**, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen,* [emphasis mine] 2 Peter 3:14-15, 18.

God sees the big picture. He is our Heavenly Father and thrives on giving us time to grow and become stronger. While we must never take His patience for granted, knowledge of this fact should bring us great comfort. Consider how Jesus handled the constant setbacks of the apostles. They struggled in understanding the concept and scope of the kingdom—even up to the night before Jesus' death. Jesus' impending death and the spiritual nature of His kingdom were a constant theme in Jesus' ministry. Yet, they just could not fully grasp God's entire plan. Not once do we see Jesus

casting them off and giving up on them. He constantly gave them new chances to learn and apply the knowledge. **God will not give up on us!** Through the Spirit, He constantly offers His help as we navigate through life – and learn more about Him. He is patient and He wants us to achieve the highest possible good.

This may be a different picture of the Father than we are used to. Far too many Christians have an inaccurate viewpoint of God. Often, Jesus is viewed as the One who is loving, compassionate, and ready to dispense grace. The Father is viewed as judgmental, vengeful, and one ready to dispense punishment at a moment's notice. Some feel they may never be able to win with their Heavenly Father. Yet, it is Jesus, who told Philip, *Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*, John 14.9b. Just as Jesus is, so is the Father. They share the same desire. God is on our side and wants our salvation. It is His good pleasure to do so. It was the Father who *raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David ... that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days*, Luke 1.69, 74-75.

The *horn of salvation* in Luke 1.69 is Jesus, our Savior. Note that it was the Father's desire to rescue (deliver) us from sin so that we can serve Him **without fear**, 1.74. It is simply impressive to see the message of assurance and hope woven throughout the Bible. In both well-known and obscure passages the message is the same: God's love, care, and concern for us is immeasurable! **The Father longs for our salvation!**

Conclusion:

Heaven is not an unattainable goal. It is not the destination of so called "super-Christians." It is the destination of those who have been forgiven and stand by the grace of God. Because of the abundant mercy of God, we have a *living hope* of salvation given to us through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. What a wonderful source of motivation for us as we go through life! God will go to whatever depth and any length to save us.

Regular meditation on these facts will radically change your life. The reality is: **God does love someone like you!**

For Thought and Reflection:

1. To what did the Hebrew writer liken sin? What are its effects?
2. What is Satan's role in tempting Christians to sin?
3. How do passages such as Romans 3.23 and 1 John 1.8-10; 2.1-3 help you as you struggle with spiritual shortcomings or setbacks?
4. What are three things we can do with sin?
5. How did Peter deal with crushing spiritual defeat? How can this be a source of inspiration to you?
6. In Hebrews 7.15, what message is communicated to us?
7. What can we learn about deity's patience in how Jesus dealt with the apostles?
8. Have you ever possessed a negative view of God the Father? If so, how did you change your perspective?
9. How can knowledge of the Father's great love for you revolutionize your spiritual life?
10. What are three points you can write down to help you live with increased assurance in your spiritual life?