

# From Fear to Faith

By  
Matthew Allen

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Lesson 1

## Why This Study?

For far too long, too many in churches of Christ have lived their spiritual life in complete worry and anxiety. If they were to die suddenly, or if the Lord were to return, would they be saved? Oh yes, they responded in primary obedience to the gospel years before, but do they remain in a saved condition? Have they done enough? Too many feel that at one moment they are in salvation, and the next moment, out of salvation. Can God forgive them for things that have gone on in their life since their salvation? Will God be patient as they deal with their shortcomings, repetitive sin, and even outright failures?

Why do so many live in uncertainty and fear? Is not God's word full of assurances? Cannot the Christian experience peace and a life free from anxiety?

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

Did not the apostles labor to explain our adoption as sons and daughters of God and talk about the riches of our spiritual inheritance in the next life?

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 writes:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

1 Peter 1:3-4

Did not John testify that when we sin we have an advocate who pleads on our behalf?

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we

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deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 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.

1 John 1:7-2:3

The Scriptures testify resoundingly that the answer to these questions is, “Yes!” New Testament Christians today 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

There is a real need for Christians to learn to trust, not in their own perfection or personal works to merit salvation, but in the power of God to forgive them when they sin. They need to learn to forgive themselves 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.

### **Why is this a problem in today’s church?**

For over seventy years, we have defended God’s truth against the false doctrine of *impossibility of apostasy*. Debate notes and long discourses on our differences with denominations have filled our pulpits with little emphasis on God’s assurance of our salvation. Please do not misunderstand. In our pulpits, there is a need for teaching that exposes denominational doctrine for what it is. *Impossibility of apostasy* is not a biblical doctrine, primarily because it denies the freewill of mankind. We are freewill beings and have the ability to choose who we will serve, before and after becoming a Christian. *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) destroy 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 want to do. The vast majority does not set out to reject God. Experiencing eternal damnation is the **last** thing they desire. But as they go through the transformation process, temptation comes during moments of weakness, and they fall. This is common to all Christians. Some may wonder, *has God really forgiven me... even if I knew better when I engaged in sin? Does God really mean it when He promises to forgive me when I repent and confess my sin? I have struggled with repetitive sin. Have I run out of chances with God?*

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### How do we address the problem?

#### **We need to do a better job of equipping Christians for the transformation process.**

Putting on the new man is not without its struggles with temptation and battles with the flesh. See Romans 7. Some persons grow faster than others. When we come to God for salvation, He will go to work in our life. Our power for survival and success lie in Him and the strength of His word. We need to get away from the unspoken teaching that says we have to be absolutely perfect all the time in order to get to heaven. We must not expect Christians to come out of the baptism water and be capable of perfection.

**We need to be more encouraging to one another and help one another when temptation knocks on the door.** Congregations need to focus on the importance of building better relationships within the 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

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

As we focus on building better relationships, **we must change the atmosphere within the family to where people feel more comfortable communicating their personal struggles and setbacks.** There is a reason why we read:

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

James 5:16 (NASV)

The church should not be viewed as a social club for persons who have it all together and all figured out. It is a hospital for sinners. God designed the church to be a place of healing and safety. Our weakest and most vulnerable Christians fall away too soon because some congregations have created such a sterile environment that they feel completely uncomfortable and intimidated by others sitting in the pew.

Imagine your congregation for a moment. Visualize some of the families who are present. There is a chance, even 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.

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- 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 their life that they cannot possibly recover and be where they think they ought to be.

These are real problems and are being faced by Christians all over the country. In some places, instead of receiving a message of hope and deliverance, they constantly hear they are not doing enough and need to do more to obey God. Instead of learning about tools that help them cope with real life situations and problems, they feel surrounded by what they perceive to be “perfect” people while their life is so “imperfect.” What we have forgotten is that many people do not need to be reminded they fall short. They know that better than we ever could. What they do need is encouragement, assurance, and edification. Congregations need to do a better job equipping saints for *real life* problems. While struggling Christians sink further into the murky depths, some turn on them, criticizing them for their shortcomings. After so long, some turn away. Spiritually, we have perfected the art of “shooting our own.” It is little wonder why we have such a high rate of losing new converts.

**We need to get away from the idea that teaching on grace, forgiveness, and mercy is “denominational.”** You may have heard a form of the following criticism: *Except for the invitation, the sermon that preacher delivered today could have been preached in any denominational church in America.* So? What’s wrong with that? This criticism is a rule devised by men. And for a religious movement that prides itself on freedom from manmade rules and creeds, we have created a few of our own. Grace, forgiveness, mercy, and hope are biblical topics. Just because the denominations preach and teach on these topics does not mean they have a lock on them. Entire generations have grown up in churches of Christ without a proper understanding of these topics.

As we go through this series of lessons, it is my desire to conduct an in depth study on the assurance of our salvation. This workbook is intended to give Christians a new found hope, confidence, and trust. We trust, 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), **have been saved** (1 Corinthians 15:2), and **shall be** saved (Romans 5:9-10). We 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 (NASB)*

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### Questions:

1. Cite examples in Scripture where the writers of the New Testament labored to express that Christians can experience spiritual peace and freedom from anxiety.
2. How can we move away from trusting in our own perfection or personal works to merit salvation?
3. What does this statement mean to you: *faith is a journey and not a destination*?
4. How would more balance in the pulpit help Christians develop a strong assurance?
5. What is the primary doctrinal problem with *impossibility of apostasy*?
6. What are steps that can be taken to better equip Christians for the transformation process?
7. Are there any methods you can suggest on how to better encourage people within our spiritual family?
8. Thinking of James 5:16b, how can we create a more “safe” environment for weaker Christians to grow?
9. Would more teaching on assurance assist in decreasing the high rate of loss among new converts?
10. What personal goals do you have as we embark upon this study?