

I. Introduction. Several interrelated problems motivate this presentation.

A. Many Christians who sincerely believe in Jesus do not have confident assurance that they will be saved in the end. Their fearfulness of death and of any major sacrifice or risk-taking for God is arguably a direct result of their lack of assurance of resurrection and eternal life.

B. This lack of assurance is a significant hindrance to witness. Most non-Christians already have plenty of stress. They need peace, not additional anxiety. When professed Christians are as stressed-out and guilt-laden as everybody else, it is no wonder that they have little success in attracting others to Jesus.

C. According to a recent survey, less than 70% of Adventists worldwide have confident assurance of present salvation (“Three Strategic Issues: A World Survey,” Institute of World Mission, Andrews University, 2002; cited by Nathan Brown, *Adventist Review*, June 19, 2003, 27). That single fact by itself doesn’t tell us much. How did the survey define assurance? Did the survey include people who are still members in name, but who are inactive, backslidden, not practicing their religion? Ellen White herself said, “this I do know, that **our churches are dying for the want of teaching on the subject of righteousness by faith in Christ, and for kindred truths**” (*1888 Materials*, 547).

But critics allege that Ellen White is primarily to blame for Adventists’ lack of assurance. They say that by teaching that no one should ever say “I am saved,” Ellen White denied the assurance given believers in the gospel. I know from my pastoral experience that many Adventists believe that Ellen White does not teach present assurance.

D. These perceptions lead Adventists to various outcomes. Some toil on in conscious legalism, hoping against hope that everything will come out all right in the end. Many give up on finding any certainty of salvation, and just decide to get what they can out of the present life. Some cling to the “simple” NT gospel, but throw out Ellen White and distinctive Adventist beliefs, since those seem to be the source of the problem.

Some, however, take a different path. They reason (correctly, I believe) that if the same Holy Spirit who inspired John and Paul also inspired Ellen G. White, then there must be an essential harmony between them. Therefore, the views that seem to deny assurance must not be the whole truth, but partial truth or distortions of truth, and we must not quit seeking until we find the whole truth.

E. A final, less widely-recognized problem: The Bible says there are many people who “believe they are saved, but who will find out in the judgment that they are lost” (Matt 7:21-23; 13-14; 8:11-12; Luke 13:23-27). “Perhaps the greatest tragedy is ministers who tell people not what they *need* to hear, but what they *want* to hear” [2 Tim 4:3-4], and thus *cause* them to believe they are saved when in actual fact they are lost (Elder Jay Gallimore, sermon, St. Joseph, MI, March 30, 2002). Therefore Paul exhorts: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2 Cor 13:5).

F. The following study presents the results of my search for and finding of a genuine assurance of salvation that I believe fully accords with the totality of the evidence in both the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. In each section, the biblical evidence is presented first. All **bold type**, underlining, and *italics* are my own.

II. Working Definitions. Assurance of Salvation is the inward witness of the Holy Spirit (**Rom 8:16; Gal 4:6**) that one has present salvation in Christ. It is possible to have salvation without assurance (**Rom 2:11-16**; DA 638), or false assurance without salvation (**Matt 7:21-23**; 1T133-134, 158, 163, 242-243), but genuine biblical assurance is essential to the normal Christian life (Luke 10:20; 1T 243; 1SM 373). The doctrine of assurance is based on Scriptures too numerous to list here, but among them are **John 3:16; John 6:37; 1 John 1:9; 1 John 5:11** (4MR 356); **2 Peter 1:1-11; Luke 15:20; 1 Tim 1:15; 2:4; Isa 1:18-20; 53:4-6, 11-12; 55:6-7; 64:6; Jer 31:3; and Ezek 36:26-27.**

Some read these texts from the viewpoint of predestination, which teaches that God determined before the Creation of the world who would be saved. Theoretically, if you are among this “elect,” you cannot be lost, so “once saved, always saved” is thought to be an irreversible guarantee of salvation. The problem with this view is that its most knowledgeable representatives admit that it is possible for individuals to **think** they are among the elect when in fact they are not. I repeat, predestinarian theologians admit that it is possible for persons who **think** they are saved to **actually** be lost (see Appendix, below). Thus the doctrine of “once saved, always saved,” is only a *theoretical* guarantee of eternal security, *not an actual* guarantee, since in that system, **one cannot infallibly know that one was “once saved.”**

A truer perspective is that salvation and assurance are grounded in God’s unchanging character of other-centered love. “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Salvation and assurance are further grounded in God’s unwavering purpose and persistent initiative to save all (Rom 5:8-10; MB 103-104; DA 175; 5T 632) who will accept the salvation provided through the life, death, resurrection, and high-priestly intercession of Jesus Christ (SC 26-27, 68). Once saved, it is possible to fall from grace, but it is not necessary. If Jesus loved us so much as to die for us while we were still enemies, how much more will He do whatever is necessary to save us, now that we have become His friends (**Rom 5:10, 19, 20**).

This is Ellen White’s position: “So ready, so eager, is the Saviour’s heart to welcome us as members of the family of God, that in the very first words we are to use in approaching God He places the assurance of our divine relationship, ‘Our Father.’ Here is the announcement of that wonderful truth, so full of encouragement and comfort, that God loves us as He loves his Son” (John 17:23; MB 103-104).

III. Ellen White’s Concept of Assurance includes three essential elements: [1] “justification through faith in the atoning blood of Christ, and [2] the renewing power of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, [3] bringing forth fruit in a life conformed to the example of Christ” (GC 256). (This statement is part of her discussion of John Wesley’s positive contributions, but she clearly agrees with him, and furthermore uses the same words in other contexts often enough to prove that they were her convictions also.) Most misconceptions about assurance arise from misunderstandings of these three elements and their relations to each other. Each of these elements has some similarities and some clear differences from the popular belief of “once saved, always saved” (FLB 157; Lt. 17, 1904).

A. First, the *objective basis* of assurance, the “root” and “ground” of salvation, is always and only justification through the work of Christ, received by faith. (Eph 2:4-10; Rom 3:23-24; 4:16; 5:1; 6:23; 8:1; 2 Cor 5:14-21; Gal 2:16, 21; John 1:29; 1 John 2:2; 1 Tim 4:10; Titus 2:11). “By His spotless life, His obedience, His death on the cross of Calvary, Christ interceded for the lost race. And now, not as a mere petitioner does the Captain of our salvation intercede for us, but as a conqueror claiming His victory” (Ms. 142, 1899, 7BC 930-931). “The

blessings of the new covenant are **grounded purely on mercy** in forgiving unrighteousness and sins,” and **“all who humble their hearts, confessing their sins, will find mercy and grace and assurance”** (Lt. 276, 1904, in 7BC 931). Those who come to Jesus must **“believe that He saves them solely through His grace. . . . Through faith we receive the grace of God; but faith is not our Saviour. It earns nothing.** It is the hand by which we lay hold upon Christ, and appropriate His merits, the remedy for sin. And we cannot even repent without the aid of the Spirit of God. [Acts 5:31 quoted]. Repentance comes from Christ as truly as does pardon” (DA 175, emphasis added).

“The thought that **the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God,** is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that **if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken.** If he can control minds so that **doubt and unbelief and darkness** shall compose the experience of those who claim to be the children of God, **he can overcome them with temptation”** (GW 161).

Excursus A: How Ellen White’s view of justification differs from “once saved, always saved.” (1) She rejected Calvinistic predestination. (2) She never reduced faith to mere belief (James 2:19). For Ellen White, faith includes intellectual *belief* in the facts of the gospel, but extends also to a *trust* in the personal character of God and Christ, that leads to voluntary *surrender* of the will to God. Faith that does not lead to surrender is only a partial faith, that has not yet matured to the point of assurance. “A nominal faith in Christ, which accepts Him merely as the Saviour of the world, can never bring healing to the soul. The faith that is unto salvation is not a mere intellectual assent to the truth. . . . It is not enough to believe about Christ; we must believe in Him. The only faith that will benefit us is that which embraces Him as a personal Saviour; which appropriates His merits to ourselves. *Many hold faith as an opinion. Saving faith is a transaction* by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. Genuine faith is life. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power” (DA 347).

“It is important that we understand clearly the nature of faith. There are many who believe that Christ is the Saviour of the world, that the gospel is true and reveals the plan of salvation, yet they do not possess saving faith. They are intellectually convinced of the truth, but this is not enough; in order to be justified, the sinner must have that faith that appropriates the merits of Christ to his own soul. We read that the devils “believe, and tremble,” but their belief does not bring them justification, neither will the belief of those who give a merely intellectual assent to the truths of the Bible bring them the benefits of salvation. This belief fails of reaching the vital point, for the truth does not engage the heart or transform the character” (3SM 191-192). “The so-called faith that does not work by love and purify the soul will not justify any man. “Ye see,” says the apostle, “how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” Abraham believed God. How do we know that he believed? His works testified to the character of his faith, and his faith was accounted to him for righteousness” (ST, May 19, 1898).

“Christ . . . is anxious to be our Helper, to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. Will you let him help you? *Say to the world, ‘Jesus is my Saviour; he saves me today, making me his obedient child, and enabling me to keep all his commandments.’ If you knowingly disregard one of God’s commandments, you do not have saving faith.* Genuine faith is a faith that works by love, and purifies the soul. Genuine faith will lead you to seek for the salvation of precious souls for whom Christ has died” (ST, June 8, 1891). “There is no saving faith that does not produce

good fruit. . . . The moment true faith in the merits of the costly atoning sacrifice is exercised, claiming Christ as a personal Saviour, that moment the sinner is justified before God” (Ms 46, 1891, in 8MR 357).

B. The experiential assurance of salvation is that when Christ is received by faith, **the Spirit of God produces a new life in the soul (Rom 6:4-11-14; 8:9-11; Gal 2:20-21; Eph 2:5-6; Col 1:27; 3:1-10, etc.)**. This “life in the soul” is the actual beginning of “the life eternal” (DA 176, 331). The insistence on the absolute necessity of this ongoing “life in the soul” constitutes the major distinction between the Adventist understanding of assurance and the popular notion that a one-time act of believing is enough to insure eternal security. “We must not base our salvation upon supposition; we must know of a surety that Christ is formed within, the hope of glory. We must know for ourselves that the Spirit of God is abiding in our hearts, and that we can hold communion with God. Then if He should come to us quickly, if by any chance our life should suddenly be ended, we should be ready to meet our God” (Ms 21, 1903, in 6MR 32). As the “flower of the field must have its root in the soil; it must have air, dew, showers, and sunshine,” so the believer must “receive from God that which ministers to the life of the soul” (TM 366, italics added). This ongoing “life of the soul” is the difference between those who merely profess faith in Christ and those who truly know Him and walk by faith in Him. It is both the believer’s highest privilege (MH 99, 6MR 31, RH April 15, 1884, par. 13) and the most basic essential. “We may have the assurance today that Jesus lives, and is making intercession for us. We cannot do good to those around us while our own souls are destitute of spiritual life” (RH April 22, 1884 par. 11). Describing her own conversion, Ellen White said, **“I felt the assurance of an indwelling Saviour”** (LS 39).

Excursus B. The truth of the “new life in the soul” is also subject to a reductionistic misunderstanding. Listen to Paul: We are “always carrying about in the body the *dying* of the Lord Jesus, that the *life* of Jesus also may be manifested in our body (2 Cor 4:10). “For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you *put to death* the deeds of the flesh, you will *live*” (Rom 8:13). “Indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, . . . that I may *know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death*, if, by any means, I may attain to the *resurrection* of the dead” (Phil 3:8-11). See also 2 Tim 2:11-12; Col 3:3-5, Rom 6; 1 Peter 4:1-3, 12-19; and many others. Ellen White also has much to say about the “crucifixion of self.” (Enter crucif* self in the search window of the CD-ROM).

The crucifixion of self refers to the fact that along with the process of “attachment” to Christ (John 15:1-8), there is a work of “detachment” from everything that is in conflict with Christ. “A union with Christ by living faith is enduring; *every other union must perish*. Christ first chose us, paying an infinite price for our redemption; and the true believer chooses Christ as first, and last, and best in everything. But this union costs us something. It is a *relation of utter dependence to be entered into by a proud being*. All who form this union must feel their need of the atoning blood of Christ. They must have a change of heart. They must submit their own will to the will of God. There will be a *struggle with outward and internal obstacles*. There must be a *painful work of detachment*, as well as a work of attachment. Pride, selfishness, vanity, worldliness--sin in all its forms--must be overcome, if we would enter into a union with Christ. The reason why many find the Christian life so deplorably hard, why they are so fickle, so variable, is, they try to attach themselves to Christ without detaching themselves from these cherished idols. . . .

“Believers become one in Christ; but one branch cannot be sustained by another. The nourishment must be obtained through vital connection with the Vine. We must feel our *utter dependence* on Christ. We must live by faith in the Son of God. That is the meaning of the

injunction, 'Abide in me.' The life we live in the flesh is not to [serve] the will of men, not to please our Lord's enemies, but to serve and honor Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us. **A mere assent** to this union, while the affections are **not detached** from the world, its pleasures and its dissipations, **only emboldens the heart in disobedience**" (ST Nov. 29, 1910, in 5BC 1143-1144). *That's the essence, the analysis, anatomy, of false assurance.* Its result is to "embolden the heart in disobedience."

Many have seen this, and in recoiling from "mere assent" have fallen into the opposite extreme: legalism, preoccupation with personal performance, and perfectionism. But notice that the dying is *both once for all* (with Christ on the cross, Rom 6:3, 6, 11; 2 Cor 5:14-15), *and a continuing process* (2 Cor 4:10). The continuing process means that it is never finished in this life until we lay off this "body of death" (Rom 7:24). That does *not* mean we go on sinning until then; but it means that the conquest of sin requires a continual dying to its attractions. This is the practical, personal experience of the cross. It is the essence of what it means to be a Christian. The original disciples didn't like it any more than we do. Peter's initial reaction to the cross was "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to you!" (Matt 16:22). But through hard experience he learned the true glory of the cross. Near the end of his life he wrote, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13). That this experience of dying to self and sin is central to following Jesus (Heb 2:18; 5:8), is seen in Paul's description of "the enemies of the cross of Christ" as those "whose end is destruction, whose *god is their belly*, and whose glory is in their shame—*who set their mind on earthly things*" (Phil 3:18-19).

"Why is it so hard to lead a self-denying, humble life? Because professed Christians are not dead to the world. **It is easy living after we are dead**" (MYP 127-128). But the process of *dying to self is not legalism*. It is not a work of merit, but a gift of grace. Thus she says, "**no man can empty himself of self. We can only consent for Christ to accomplish the work.** Then the language of the soul will be, Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristlike self" (COL 159). "He [Christ] is knocking at the door of your heart, asking for admittance. He longs to renew your heart, filling it with a love for all that is pure and true. **He longs to crucify self for you, raising you to newness of life in him**" (*Youth's Instructor*, Sept. 9, 1897). (Self is the crucified, not the crucifier).

C. The external evidence of salvation is fruit bearing in obedience and loving service (John 15:1-8; Gal 5:22-23; Col 3:1-11). Because "those who are in connection with God are channels for the power of the Holy Spirit," the "**inner life of the soul will reveal itself in the outward conduct**" (HP 22). The human response of grateful love to God, bearing fruit in obedience and service, is in no sense the root or ground of salvation, but it does constitute visible evidence that there is life in the soul. "As the mother watches for the smile of recognition from her little child, which tells of the dawning of intelligence, so does Christ watch for the expression of grateful love, which shows that spiritual life is begun in the soul" (DA 191). "If Christ is dwelling in the heart, it is impossible to conceal His presence" (MB 41). This impossibility of concealing the divine life in the soul is the consideration that explains Ellen White's frequent emphasis on the external evidences of salvation. The lack of visible change in the life of a professed Christian she

regards as clear evidence that there is no divine life within, hence that the new birth has not yet occurred. If the new birth has not yet occurred, the person does not have salvation, and any claim to assurance would be self-deception.

D. Summarizing so far, we may say that [1] **the ground of assurance is justification** by grace alone through faith alone; [2] **the experience of assurance is the ongoing life of the Holy Spirit in the soul**, and [3] **the outward evidence of assurance is fruit bearing** in obedience and loving service. Where any of these is absent, assurance must be called in question. Where these are present, believers should rejoice and not let Satan steal away their sense of security.

IV. Related Aspects of Assurance

A. Assurance is maintained by faith, through a daily (continual) union with Christ (John 15:4-5; Phil 4:13; Col 2:6; 1 John 5:11-13). “Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour. [1] **By prayer, by the study of His word, by faith in His abiding presence, the weakest of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ**, and [2] **He will hold them by a hand that will never let go**” (*Ministry of Healing*, 182). “Sinful man can find hope and righteousness only in God, and no human being is righteous any longer than he has faith in God *and maintains a vital connection with Him.*”

B. A Biblical Concept of Security recognizes the biblical teaching that believers retain for eternity the freedom to turn away from God (Ezek 33:12-20; cf. *Signs of the Times*, Dec. 30, 1889) hence the necessity and privilege of a daily renewal of conversion (Luke 9:23). But for those who yield to the Lordship of Christ through the Holy Spirit, daily responding to His love and daily seeking a more complete surrender to His will, there is abundant and solid security. It is **not** the security of an irreversible guarantee, **but the security of serving a God whose persistence in seeking the sinner goes far beyond the weakness of the believer’s faith (John 10:28; Luke 10:20; 15:4-7, 8-10, 20-24; 1 John 1:9; 2:1; Rom 5:10; 8:28-30, 35-39).** The one who keeps on coming to Him will *never* be cast out (**John 6:37**). Thus she writes, “**All who have put on the robe of Christ’s righteousness will stand before Him as chosen and faithful and true. Satan has no power to pluck them out of the hand of the Saviour. Not one soul who in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy’s power**” (PK 587, on **Zech 3:4-7**; cf. MB 71 and **1 Cor 10:13**).

One of Ellen White’s favorite texts on security was 1 John 2:1. In a letter to a woman in desperate need of assurance, White reported hearing this text in vision, quoted by an angel.

“Said the angel, ‘God leaves not His people, even if they err. He turns not from them in wrath for any light thing. If they sin they have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.’” She continued, **“He who so loved you as to give His own life for you will not turn you off and forsake you unless you willfully, determinedly forsake Him to serve the world and Satan”** (Lt. 17, 1862 to *Susan G. Russell, excerpted in HP 119).

Again she wrote, **“if any man sin, he is not to give himself up to despair, and talk like a man who is lost to Christ.** ‘If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous’” [1 John 2:1] (ST, Jan. 3, 1895).

Confronting some ministers, delegates at the 1883 General Conference, who were anxious and worried, “talking fears and doubts” as to whether they would be saved, she challenged,

“Brethren, you have expressed many doubts; but have you followed your Guide? **You must dispense with [H]im before you can lose your way; for the Lord has hedged you in on every side**” (RH, April 15, 1884). Climaxing one of her most powerful appeals to trust in Christ, she declared, “Faith comes by the word of God. Then grasp His promise, **‘Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.’ John 6:37.** Cast yourself at His feet with the cry, ‘Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.’ *You can never perish while you do this--never*” (DA 429).

To a mature Christian who, because of depression due to illness, found it hard to believe, Ellen White wrote, “The message from God to me for you is **‘Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out’ (John 6:37).** If you have nothing else to plead before God but this one promise from your Lord and Saviour, you have the **assurance that you will never, never be turned away.** It may seem to you that you are hanging upon a single promise, but **appropriate that one promise and it will open to you the whole treasure house of the riches of the grace of Christ. Cling to that promise and you are safe. ‘Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.’ Present this assurance to Jesus, and you are as safe as though inside the city of God**” (10MR 175). Despite the possibility of backsliding, she believed in present assurance and security. “If you are right with God today, you are ready if Christ should come today” (HP 227).

C. How to find true assurance underscores the biblical truth that the ground of salvation is the merit of Christ alone. To those seeking to merit salvation, she writes, “It makes all the difference in the world with us spiritually whether we **rely upon God without doubt, as upon a sure foundation, or whether we are seeking to find some righteousness in ourselves** before we come to Him. Look away from self to the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.”

To others who “seem to feel that they must be on probation and must prove to the Lord that they are reformed before they can claim His blessing,” she reassures that “these dear souls may **claim the blessing of God even now. They must have His grace, the spirit of Christ to help their infirmities, or they cannot form Christian characters.** Jesus loves to have us come to Him just as we are—sinful, helpless, dependent” (RH April 22, 1884).

To those who doubt the reality of *present* assurance, she cautions, “**You are not to look to the future,** thinking that at some distant day you are to be made holy; **it is now** that you are to be sanctified through the truth. . . . **No one can make himself better,** but we are to **come to Jesus as we are,** earnestly desiring to be cleansed from every spot and stain of sin, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **We are not to doubt his mercy, and say, ‘I do not know whether I shall be saved or not.’** By living faith we must lay hold of his promise, for he has said, ‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow’ (ST, April 4, 1892, par. 3, emphasis added). “Each one of **you may know** for yourself that you have a living Saviour, that he is your helper and your God. **You need not stand where you say, ‘I do not know whether I am saved.’** Do you believe in Christ as your personal Saviour? If you do, then rejoice” (GCB April 10, 1901, par. 14, emphasis added). “It is God that circumcises the heart. **The whole work is the Lord's from the beginning to the end. The perishing sinner may say: ‘I am a lost sinner; but Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He says, ‘I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance’ (Mark 2:17). I am a sinner, and He died upon Calvary's cross to save me. I need not remain a moment longer unsaved.** He died and rose again for my justification, and **He will save me now. I accept the forgiveness He has promised**” (1SM 392).

D. The Danger of False Assurance. White's frequent attention to the external evidences of salvation is an expression of her concern that many who think they are saved will find out too late that they are lost. "Desires for goodness and holiness are right as far as they go; but if you stop here, they will avail nothing. Many will be lost while hoping and desiring to be Christians. They do not come to the point of yielding the will to God." (SC 47-48).

Most of the misconceptions about Ellen White's concept of assurance spring from a few passages that are clearly **warnings against false assurance**, but are not denials of true assurance. Thus she warns that "We are never to *rest in a satisfied condition*, and *cease to make advancement*, saying, 'I am saved.'" Her opposition here is not against the words "I am saved," but against an attitude sometimes expressed by those words, that ongoing spiritual life and growth are unnecessary. "When this idea is entertained, the motives for watchfulness, for prayers, for earnest endeavor to press onward to higher attainments, cease to exist. . . . As long as *man is full of weakness--for of himself he cannot save his soul--he should never dare to say, 'I am [eternally, irrevocably] saved'*" (1SM 314; cf. "saved, and sinless," 3SM 355). The ground of her warning against a presumptuous claim of assurance is the fundamental gospel fact that man "cannot save his soul." The one who knows he can do nothing toward his own salvation except to respond to the wooing of the Holy Spirit, will be the most careful not to knowingly resist such love.

On the other hand, a parallel statement supports the point that by "saved" in the quotation above, she refers to "once saved, always saved," not to genuine biblical assurance. "When the conflict of life is ended, when the armor is laid off at the feet of Jesus, when the saints of God are glorified, *then and then only will it be safe to claim that we are saved, and sinless*" (3SM 355).

A similar admonition **against false assurance** cautions that "never can we safely *put confidence in self or feel, this side of heaven, that we are secure against temptation*. . . . Those who accept Christ, and in their first confidence say, I am saved, are in danger of trusting to themselves. They lose sight of their own weakness and their constant need of divine strength. They are unprepared for Satan's devices, and under temptation many, like Peter, fall into the very depths of sin. . . . 'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.' 1 Cor. 10:12. **Our only safety is in constant distrust of self, and dependence on Christ**" (COL 155). "Saved" is here equated with putting "confidence in self" and feeling that one is "secure against temptation." But right in the midst of these cautions, occurs the balancing promise that "when we give ourselves to Christ" we may "know that He accepts us," showing that her opposition is not against true biblical assurance, but against presumption leading to false assurance.

E. A major insight into Ellen White's thinking about righteousness by faith. The above quotation, with its closely connected counsels of caution, on the one hand, and encouragement, on the other hand, is an excellent example of Ellen White's writings on salvation. (1) On the one hand, she is deeply concerned to protect believers against Satan's devices of self-confidence and self-dependence, and this concern leads her to write strong cautions against a certain kind of talk ("I am saved!") that is commonly misunderstood and when misunderstood leads to spiritual defeat. (2) On the other hand, she is equally concerned that believers have legitimate biblical assurance, that is based in Christ, not in self, and that is appropriately aware of the snares that Satan has prepared for Christ's true disciples.

This **close combination of caution and encouragement is totally typical** of Ellen White's writings, especially her writings on salvation, spirituality, discipleship, and righteousness by

faith. When you discover that these balancing counsels occur practically everywhere in her writings, you realize that this is the way she thinks. On the one hand, she knows the danger of going to the over-confident extreme (presumptuous assurance); yet on the other hand, she knows you can also fail spiritually by focusing on your own performance as the basis of your acceptance with God (legalism). So as soon as she warns someone against the one extreme, she thinks, “but what if they go to the other extreme?”—and immediately or within a few paragraphs she normally includes the balancing counsel to guard against the other extreme.

Which category (caution or encouragement) predominates in a given passage seems to depend on who she has in mind as the audience. Thus in some testimonies of rebuke to an individual, the rebuke may predominate, but the encouragement is there also if you look for it. In other genres of her writing, such as *Steps to Christ* or *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, the encouragement is often more predominant. In most cases, as noted above, the balancing counsel occurs in the same passage. But when you realize that she is *always* thinking in these “both/and” categories, that she is *always* concerned for the dual or multiple dimensions of a spiritual issue, then if you don’t find the balancing counsel in the immediate context, you realize that it is very likely assumed, because in her mature writings, she *always* thinks in these categories. So, if you don’t see it immediately, start looking for it, and you will always find it, either in the immediate context or in other places where she deals with the same issue.

This is what I have elsewhere referred to as the *paradigm shift* that occurs when a person realizes that Ellen White is really a thoroughgoing believer in righteousness by faith. I have heard of an old man, a hard-headed, do-it-yourself, strong-willed believer in sanctification by stern effort, who late in life confessed, “I never used to find righteousness by faith in the writings of Ellen White, but when you see it, it’s everywhere you look.” One of my highest hopes and most earnest prayers for this class is that every student discover that this deep-rooted, dyed-in-the-wool, righteousness by faith is pervasive in the writings of Ellen G. White. Because when you see it you will never again find condemnation in her writings, but rather hope and courage and faith.

“While the Christian's life will be characterized by humility, it should not be marked with sadness and self-depreciation. It is the privilege of everyone so to live that God will approve and bless him. **It is not the will of our heavenly Father that we should be ever under condemnation and darkness.** There is no evidence of true humility in going with the head bowed down and the heart filled with thoughts of self. We may go to Jesus and be cleansed, and stand before the law without shame and remorse. ‘There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.’ Romans 8:1” (GC 477).

F. The Necessity of True Assurance. The broader context of Ellen White’s writings on righteousness by faith (uniting caution with encouragement) shows that her warnings against false assurance do not by any means negate her strong teaching on true assurance. On the contrary, she insisted that **“it is essential to believe you are saved”** (RH, Nov. 1, 1892). Of herself she wrote, *“Jesus has saved me, though I had nothing to present to Him”* (RH, July 14, 1891, par. 11). *“The perishing sinner . . . need not remain a moment longer unsaved”* (ISM 392). Repentant sinners may *“claim the blessing of God even now”* (3SM 150). The believer *“need not stand where you say, ‘I do not know whether I am saved’”* (GCB April 10, 1901, par.

14). And the one who clings to Christ with present active faith can be “as safe as though inside the city of God” (10MR 175).

G. What Happens to Assurance When We Sin? “My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). Note that it is precisely “if anyone sins” that the text assures “we have an Advocate.” Those who accept the command to “sin not” are precisely those who are promised that when they sin they will not be forsaken by their Advocate (see HP 119). Again she wrote, “**if any man sin, he is not to give himself up to despair, and talk like a man who is lost to Christ.** ‘If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous’” (ST, Jan. 3, 1895).

Salvation is a gift which precedes and enables overcoming. “Some seem to feel that they must be on probation, and must prove to the Lord that they are reformed, before they can claim His blessing. But they may claim the blessing of God even now. **They must have His grace, the Spirit of Christ, to help their infirmities, or they cannot resist evil.** Jesus loves to have us come to Him just as we are, sinful, helpless, dependent. We may come with all our weakness, our folly, our sinfulness, and fall at His feet in penitence. It is His glory to encircle us in the arms of His love and to bind up our wounds, to cleanse us from all impurity” (SC 52).

“Those who are placed in the highest positions may lead astray, especially if they feel that there is no danger. The wisest err; the strongest grow weary. Excess of caution is often attended with as great danger as excess of confidence. **To go forward without stumbling, we must have the assurance that a hand all-powerful will hold us up, and an infinite pity be exercised toward us if we fall.** God alone can at all times hear our cry for help” (ST, July 28, 1881).

Our steadfast goal must be, not to sin. But if that is our goal, we are not cast off when we fall (1 Jn 2:1).

“There are those who have known the pardoning love of Christ and who really desire to be children of God, yet **they realize that their character is imperfect, their life faulty, and they are ready to doubt whether their hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit.** To such I would say, Do not draw back in despair. **We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God.** No; Christ is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Said the beloved John, ‘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.’ 1 John 2:1.” (SC 64).

“We shall fail often in our efforts to copy the divine pattern. We shall often have to bow down to weep at the feet of Jesus, because of our shortcomings and mistakes; but **we are not to be discouraged;** we are to **pray more fervently, believe more fully, and try again** with more steadfastness to grow into the likeness of our Lord. As we distrust our own power, we shall trust the power of our Redeemer, and render praise to God, who is the health of our countenance, and our God” (ISM 337). God is not unmindful of our honest striving, even though that striving is not immediately or fully successful. “For He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust” (Ps. 103:14). **“You may not obtain the entire victory at once; but persevere, keep trying”** (AY 56).

“You have one Mediator, Jesus Christ, the righteous. In contrition of soul go to him and tell all your sins. The promise is sure, ‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ John says: ‘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.’ ‘That ye sin not’—here is where you bring yourself into condemnation when you continue to sin. But in the strength of Christ cease to sin. Every provision has been made that grace should abide with you, and that sin may appear to you the hateful thing it is. **But if any man sin, he is not to give himself up to despair, and talk like a man who is lost** to Christ. ‘If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only; but also for the sins of the whole world.’” . . . [W]hen you fell into sin you walked in darkness. When you yielded to temptation, you must have ceased to look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith. But, having confessed your sins, *believe that the word of God cannot fail, but that he is faithful that hath promised. It is just as much your duty to believe that God will fulfill his word, and forgive your sins, as it is your duty to confess your sins.* You must exercise faith in God as in one who will do exactly as he has promised to do in his word, and pardon all your transgressions” (ST, Jan. 3, 1895).

How may we know that the Lord is indeed our sin-pardoning Redeemer, and prove what is the blessedness, the grace, the love there is in him for us? O, we must believe his word implicitly, with contrite and submissive spirit. **There is no need to go mourning and ever repenting, and under a cloud of continual condemnation. Believe the word of God, keep looking unto Jesus, dwelling upon his virtues and mercies, and there will be created in the heart an utter abhorrence of that which is evil.** You will be among those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. But the more closely we discern Jesus, the more clearly we shall see our own defects of character. As we see our failings, let us confess them to Jesus, and, with true contrition of soul, co-operate with the divine power of the Holy Spirit to overcome all evil. *If we confess our sins, we must believe that they are pardoned,* because the promise is positive: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Let us no more dishonor God by doubting his pardoning love” (ibid.).

The one who is striving for an uninterrupted connection with God stands in a different position than the unbelieving sinner. “If one who daily communes with God errs from the path, if he turns a moment from looking steadfastly unto Jesus, it is not because he sins willfully; for when he sees his mistake, he turns again, and fastens his eyes upon Jesus, and the fact that he has erred, does not make him less dear to the heart of God. He knows that he has communion with the Saviour; and when reproved [by God] for his mistake in some matter of judgment, he does not walk sullenly, and complain of God, but *turns the mistake into a victory. He learns a lesson* from the words of the Master, and takes heed that he be not again deceived. Those who truly love God have **internal evidence [assurance,** Rom 8:16; Gal 4:6] that they are beloved of God, that they have communion with Christ, that their hearts are warmed with fervent love toward him” (RH, May 12, 1896).

V. Conclusion. Ellen White’s warnings against the misuse of the claim, “I am saved” were not directed at a true biblical concept of present assurance in Christ, but against the idea of an irreversible guarantee leading to self-confidence, presumption, and casual disobedience. *She was just as forceful about the necessity of true present assurance,* understood in the context of justification by faith, daily connection with Christ, and obedience to the known will of God.

Those who come to God daily, trusting in His love, feeding on His word, and submitting themselves to His loving discipline, are “right with God today,” and “ready if Christ should come today” (HP 227). And every day we live by faith makes it easier and more likely that we will make that choice again tomorrow (**Rom 5:10**).

Patterns for Prayer: “The perishing sinner may say: ‘I am a lost sinner; but Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He says, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (**Mark 2:17**). I am a sinner, and He died upon Calvary's cross to save me. I need not remain a moment longer unsaved. He died and rose again for my justification, and He will save me now. I accept the forgiveness He has promised’ ” (ISM 392.1).

“But no man can empty himself of self. We can only consent for Christ to accomplish the work. Then the language of the soul will be, Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristlike self. Mold me, fashion me, raise me into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul” (COL 159).

“Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, ‘Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.’ This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ” (SC 70-71).

Appendix: A Closer Look at the Popular Doctrine of “Once Saved, Always Saved.”

A. The idea of an irreversible guarantee (“once saved, always saved”) is based on predestinarian presuppositions, namely, that no one can be converted unless they were already elected to salvation, therefore conversion proves election. The syllogism continues, that the elect can under no circumstances be lost, therefore “perseverance” in salvation is guaranteed.

B. However, even among those who believe in “once saved, always saved,” knowledgeable representatives recognize that one who **thinks** he’s saved can later be lost. Source: Norman Geisler, evangelical theologian and “moderate Calvinist,” in *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999). Geisler explains:

“Of course, there are some significant differences between moderate Calvinists and moderate Arminians, but they do not negate the similarities. One of those differences was discussed above, namely, whether “once saved, always saved” is accurate. But even here, in actual practice, the similarities are greater than many think. The vast majority of proponents of both views hold that if a professing Christian turns away from Christ and lives in continual sin that this is evidence that he is not saved. **The difference is that the moderate Calvinists claim that he was never saved to begin with,** and the moderate Arminians believe that he was. And both believe that the unrepentant who continue in sin are not true believers” (Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, p. 130).

Thus the doctrine of “once saved, always saved,” is a theoretical guarantee of eternal security, not an actual guarantee, since in that theological system, **one cannot infallibly know that one was “once saved.”**

The biblical view: you **can** know that you are presently saved (Rom 8:16-17; Gal 4:6; 1 John 1:9; John 6:37), but whether you are ultimately saved depends on whether you choose to continue in saving relationship with Christ (2 Peter 2:15, 21). If you choose to continue in connection with Him, He will never abandon you (John 5:37; Phil 1:6).

Additional resources: For a longer (and earlier) handout (17 pages), go to www.andrews.edu/~jmoon. Click on Courses; GSEM534 EGW Writings; “Are You Saved? Should You Say So? Ellen White on Assurance.”

See also Frank Phillips, *His Robe or Mine* (Berrien Springs, MI: Justified Walk Ministries, 2003), available on the Web at www.justifiedwalk.com and www.path2prayer.com.