

## **Are You Saved? Should You Say So? What Ellen White Taught about Assurance**

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### **I. Introduction**

#### **A. Two widely-recognized problems motivate this presentation.**

1. 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 in *Adventist Review* June 19, 2003, 27).
2. Critics allege that Ellen White denied the assurance given believers in the gospel by teaching that no one should ever say “I am saved.” From my own experience as a pastor, I know that many Adventists believe that Ellen White does not teach present assurance. Is this true or false?

#### **B. These perceptions lead people to various outcomes.**

1. Some people give up on finding any certainty of salvation, and just decide to get what they can out of the present life.
2. Some cling to the “simple” NT gospel, but throw out Ellen G. White and the Adventist distinctives, since those seem to be the source of the problem.
3. Some reason (correctly, I believe) that if the same Holy Spirit that inspired John and Paul also inspired Ellen G. White, then there must be an essential harmony between them. Therefore, the beliefs that seem to bring despair must not be the whole truth, but partial truth or distortions of the truth, and we must not quit seeking until we find the whole truth.

#### **C. Purpose of this Presentation:** To apply the hermeneutical process to the solution of these problems. It is not the purpose of this paper to set forth a gospel presentation for leading sinners to Christ. The purpose is to address the needs of those who have read certain Ellen G. White statements that seem to deny a legitimate biblical assurance in order that we may find a true, solidly based assurance.

**The Bible declares that 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).

In view of this real danger, Paul exhorted the Corinthians: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2 Cor 13:5). Ellen White echoes the same warning:

**“Deal truly with your own soul. Be as earnest, as persistent, as you would be if your mortal life were at stake. This is a matter to be settled between God and your own soul, settled for eternity. A supposed hope, and nothing more, will prove your ruin”** (SC 35.1). “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).

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). **We need not have a supposed hope, but an assurance. To make our calling and election sure is to follow the Bible plan to closely examine ourselves, to make strict inquiry whether we are indeed converted, whether our minds are drawn out after God and heavenly things, our wills renewed, our whole souls changed. To make our calling and election sure requires far greater diligence than many are giving to this important matter. ‘For if ye do these things’—live on the plan of addition, growing in grace and the knowledge of**

our Lord Jesus Christ—ye shall mount up, step by step, the ladder Jacob saw, and ‘**ye shall never fall**: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ ” (19MR 351).

The entire Ms 13, 1884, “The Ladder to Heaven,” is an exposition of 2 Peter 1:1-11, probably a sermon stenographically recorded. This passage, reportedly EGW’s favorite preaching passage, was one that she regarded as essential to a biblical understanding of assurance.)

The following study presents the results of my search for and discovery of a genuine assurance of salvation that I believe fully accords with the totality of the evidence in both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.

*Warning: Don’t accept this just because I say so. Study and pray through it for yourself, and if you find I’m wrong on some point, please bring it to my attention. This is a study in progress, not a finished dogma. All bold face type, underlining, and/or italics are my own.*

#### **D. Working Definitions**

1. Salvation = the gift of eternal life.
2. Assurance = the personal certainty, confidence, that one possesses salvation in Christ.
3. False assurance = assurance without salvation. It is also possible to have salvation without assurance.

#### **E. Hermeneutical Outline**

1. Preparation of heart and mind
1. All Available Data
2. Contexts
  - a. Literary
  - b. Historical
  - c. Theological
3. Principles and their Applications
4. Specialized resources for exceptional cases: The Ellen G. White Estate
  - a. **World Wide Web:** <<http://www.WhiteEstate.org>>
  - b. **Andrews University Research Center, James White Library**  
Telephones: 616-471-6266, 3209
  - c. **General Conference, Main Office of the White Estate**  
E-mail: Tim Poirier: <[TPoirier@WhiteEstate.org](mailto:TPoirier@WhiteEstate.org)>  
Telephones:  
Administrative Secretary: 301-680-6545  
Tim Poirier: 301-680-6552

#### **F. The Inner Dynamic of the Hermeneutical Process**

1. If: “**All Available Data**” reveals conflicting counsels, this is a clue that the counsels involve:
5. Different **Contexts**, and/or
3. **Distinctions** between **Principles** and their **Applications**.

## **II. Seeking “All Available Ellen G. White Data” on Assurance**

### **A. Overview of Basic Categories**

1. Proof that Ellen White did believe in having true present assurance
2. How to find true assurance in Christ
3. How to maintain true assurance in Christ
4. Warnings against false assurance

### **B. Proof that Ellen White Did Believe in Having True Present Assurance**

5. **“Simple faith in the atoning blood can save my soul; and with John, I must call the attention of all to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. Jesus has saved me, though I had nothing to present to him, and could only say,--**  
‘In my hand no price I bring,  
Simply to thy cross I cling.’  
**Never did a sinner seek the Saviour with the whole heart, but that the Saviour was found of him.** Every soul who trusts in Jesus can say,--  
‘Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
Because thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.’  
**“We may claim the blessed assurance, ‘I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions.’ Thy ‘sins, which are many, are forgiven.’** O, how precious, how refreshing, is the sunlight of God's love! **The sinner may look upon his sin-stained life, and say, ‘Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.’ ‘Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.’** Christ, the Restorer, plants a new principle of life in the soul, and that plant grows and produces fruit. *The grace of Christ purifies while it pardons, and fits men for a holy heaven.* We are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, until we reach the full stature of men and women in Christ” (RH, July 14, 1891, par. 11-13).
6. **“If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us.”** How many a sin-burdened soul has echoed that prayer. And to all, the pitying Saviour's answer is, ‘If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.’ It is faith that connects us with heaven, and brings us strength for coping with the powers of darkness. In Christ, God has provided means for subduing every sinful trait, and resisting every temptation, however strong. But many feel that they lack faith, and therefore they remain away from Christ. Let these souls, in their helpless unworthiness, cast themselves upon the mercy of their compassionate Saviour. Look not to self, but to Christ. He who healed the sick and cast out demons when He walked among men is the same mighty Redeemer today. 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 429.1).
3. Counsel to a mature Christian who, in depression because of illness, found it hard to believe. Notice that while Ellen G. White gave strong warnings against false assurance, especially to those rejecting God's law, she wrote just the opposite to a woman she knew to be a faithful follower of Jesus. The *principle* is the same, but here it is *applied* to one who was living the biblical conditions for assurance.  
“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 175.1).

Note that it is a *present* assurance. As long as you depend on Him in active faith, you have the assurance of His acceptance. For virtually the same promise based on John 6:37 but addressed to everyone in general, see DA 429.1, above.

### C. How to Find True Present Assurance in Christ

1. “Jesus is our Saviour **today**. He is pleading for us in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, and He will forgive our sins. **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. **It is a sin to doubt.** The least unbelief, if cherished in the heart, involves the soul in guilt, and brings great darkness and discouragement. . . .  
“**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 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. We claim to be children of the light, not of the night nor of darkness; what right have we to be unbelieving?—*Review and Herald*, April 22, 1884 (3SM 150.1).
2. “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. . . . We are to receive the Holy Ghost. We have had an idea that this gift of God was not for such as we are, that the gift of the Holy Spirit was too sacred, too holy for us; but the Holy Spirit is the Comforter that Christ promised to his disciples . . . . Then let us cease to look to ourselves, but look to him from whom all virtue comes. **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, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool’ (ST, April 4, 1892, par. 3).
3. “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. We do not rejoice half as much as we should” (*General Conference Bulletin*, April 10, 1901, par. 14).
4. “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 392.1).  
As used here, “save me” = accept me as a disciple.

### D. How to Maintain True Assurance: God's Role and Ours

1. “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*, 182.1).

### E. Warnings Against False Assurance

## EGW on Assurance

1. “Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved. This is misleading. Every one should be taught to cherish hope and faith; but even when we give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us, *we are not beyond the reach of temptation*. God’s word declares, ‘Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried.’ Dan. 12:10. Only he who endures the trial will receive the crown of life. (James 1:12.)” (COL 155.1)
2. “We are never to rest in a satisfied condition, and cease to make advancement, saying, ‘I am saved.’ When this idea is entertained, the motives for watchfulness, for prayers, for earnest endeavor to press onward to higher attainments, cease to exist. No sanctified tongue will be found uttering these words till Christ shall come, and we enter in through the gates into the city of God. Then, with the utmost propriety, we may give glory to God and to the Lamb for eternal deliverance. As long as man is full of weakness--for of himself he cannot save his soul--he should never dare to say, ‘I am saved’ (1SM 314.2).

### F. “All Available Data” Reveals Sharp Contrasts

#### 1. *Positive Counsels*

- a. She said of herself: “**Jesus has saved me**, though I had nothing to present to Him” (RH, July 14, 1891, par. 11).
- b. “It is **essential** to believe you are saved” (RH, Nov. 1, 1892).
- c. “The perishing sinner may say: . . . ‘I need not remain a moment longer unsaved’” (ISM 392.1). (Being “unsaved” = being lost).
- d. Repentant sinners should “claim the blessing of God even now” (3SM 150).
- e. The believer “need not stand where you say, ‘I do not know whether I am saved’” (GCB April 10, 1901, par. 14). (This was addressed to Holy Flesh crisis at the 1901 General Conference, where many believed perfection/full sanctification precedes or conditions assurance. See also *ST*, April 4, 1892, above.)
- f. The one who clings constantly to Christ with present active faith can be “as safe as though inside the city of God” (10MR 175.1).

#### 2. *Negative Counsels*

- a. Don’t teach new converts to say, “I am saved” (COL 155) —with the connotation of being “beyond the reach of temptation,” and beyond the possibility of falling.
- b. Don’t say “I am saved” (ISM 314) —addressed to *antinomians* who claimed “once saved, always saved.” regardless.
- c. No one is ultimately secure until inside the “city of God” (ISM 314) —in other words, losing faith and being lost is still possible.

#### 3. *When “All Available Data” shows sharply contrasting counsels, what does that indicate?*

—the need to consider:

- a. Contexts—literary, historical, theological, biblical
- b. Principles or Applications

### III. Contexts

#### A. Biblical Context:

1. The Great Controversy Theme. See Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, pp. 256-260.
  - a. As long as Satan lives, and
  - b. As long as we have sinful human nature (1SM, 344)
  - c. There will be spiritual battles and the possibility of falling.  
“So long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained. Sanctification is the result of lifelong obedience” (AA 560.3).
2. The Elliptical Principle (Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, pp. 260-263, 573-575). The concepts of “present assurance” and the “possibility of falling” are not either/or alternatives, but both/and paradoxical dimensions of a true doctrine of salvation.
3. The Biblical Evidence: A Brief Overview

- a.

<i>Promises</i>	<i>Conditions</i>
(1) John 6:37	Come to Christ
(2) John 10:14-15, 27-28	Know Christ
(3) John 15:1-8	Abide in Christ
(4) John 3:16-21	Believe, come to the light, live the truth
(5) 1 John 1:9	Confess our sins
(6) 1 John 5:10-13	Believe, be “in Christ”
(7) 2 Pet 1:5-11	Sanctification as evidence of salvation
(8) Heb 10:14	“Perfected forever” on condition that we continue in the relationship with Christ through which we are “being sanctified”
- b. Warnings about possibility of falling.
  - (1) Ezekiel 18: 21-24 A righteous person who turns away from righteousness will be punished with the wicked
  - (2) Matt 18:21-35 Forgiveness can be forfeited
  - (3) 1 Cor 9:27 Even a minister can fall away and be lost
  - (4) 1 Cor 10: 1-5, 12 Israelites, though “baptized,” fell away. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”
  - (5) Gal 3:1-3; 5:4 “You have fallen from grace.”
  - (6) Heb 3:12-14 Beware of apostasy through unbelief
  - (7) Heb 6:4-8 Apostasy crucifies Christ again
  - (8) Heb 10:26-29, 36-38 Continuing in known sin tramples the Son of God underfoot; profanes the blood of the covenant, and insults the Spirit of grace
  - (9) 2 Peter 2:20-22 Better not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from it
  - (10) Jude 5 Once “saved,” but later “destroyed”
  - (11) Rev 2:4-5, 25; 3:2-3, 11, 15-16 Churches threatened with “removal” if they don’t repent and change; those who endure to the end will be saved
- c. *Present* assurance, based on the Word and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.
  - (1) Rom 8:1, 14-17
  - (2) Gal 4:6-7
  - (3) Acts 5:32
  - (4) 1 John 3:18-22
  - (5) Luke 23:43

## EGW on Assurance

- d. As God took the original initiative for our salvation, so he takes the initiative in maintaining our salvation.
  - (1) Rom 5:1, 6-10
  - (2) Phil 1:6
4. Ellen White's Teaching agrees with these Scriptures.
  - a. Salvation is given to those who have true faith.
  - b. It is always possible to backslide
  - c. Despite the possibility of backsliding we may have *present* assurance.

“If you are right with God today, you are ready if Christ should come today”(In *Heavenly Places*, 227).
  - b. As God took the original initiative for our salvation, so He takes the initiative in maintaining our salvation.
    - (1) “The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. **His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour**” (DA 175.5).
    - (2) “In the matchless gift of His son, **God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up** to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus” (SC 68.1).
    - (3) “**Christ is the source of every right impulse.** He is the only one that can implant in the heart enmity against sin. Every desire for truth and purity, every conviction of our own sinfulness, is an evidence that His Spirit is moving upon our hearts.

“Jesus has said, ‘I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.’”

John 12:32. Christ must be revealed to the sinner as the Saviour dying for the sins of the world; and as we behold the Lamb of God upon the cross of Calvary, the mystery of redemption begins to unfold to our minds and **the goodness of God leads us to repentance.** In dying for sinners, Christ manifested a love that is incomprehensible; and as the sinner beholds this love, it softens the heart, impresses the mind, and inspires contrition in the soul.

“**It is true that men sometimes become ashamed of their sinful ways, and give up some of their evil habits, before they are conscious that they are being drawn to Christ. But whenever they make an effort to reform, from a sincere desire to do right, it is the power of Christ that is drawing them.** An influence of which they are unconscious works upon the soul, and the conscience is quickened, and the outward life is amended. And **as Christ draws them** to look upon His cross, to behold Him whom their sins have pierced, the commandment comes home to the conscience. The wickedness of their life, the deep-seated sin of the soul, is revealed to them. They begin to comprehend something of the righteousness of Christ, and exclaim, ‘What is sin, that it should require such a sacrifice for the redemption of its victim? Was all this love, all this suffering, all this humiliation, demanded, that we might not perish, but have everlasting life?’”

“**The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus; a knowledge of the plan of salvation will lead him to the foot of the cross in repentance for his sins, which have caused the sufferings of God's dear Son**” (SC 26-27).
    - (4) “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.

“The wind is heard among the branches of the trees, rustling the leaves and flowers; yet it is invisible, and no man knows whence it comes or whither it goes. So with the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. It can no more be explained than can

the movements of the wind. A person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or to trace all the circumstances in the process of conversion; but this does not prove him to be unconverted. **By an agency as unseen as the wind, Christ is constantly working upon the heart. Little by little, perhaps unconsciously to the receiver, impressions are made that tend to draw the soul to Christ. These may be received through meditating upon Him, through reading the Scriptures, or through hearing the word from the living preacher. Suddenly, as the Spirit comes with more direct appeal, the soul gladly surrenders itself to Jesus. By many this is called sudden conversion; but it is the result of long wooing by the Spirit of God,—a patient, protracted process**” (DA 172.3).

**B. Literary Context, Example #1: *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 155**

1. “Peter’s fall was not instantaneous, but gradual. **Self-confidence led him to the belief that he was saved**, and step after step was taken in the downward path, until he could deny his Master. Never can we safely put **confidence in self** or feel, this side of heaven, that we are **secure against temptation**. Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved. This is misleading. Every one should be taught to cherish hope and faith; but even when we give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us, we are not beyond the reach of temptation. God’s word declares, “Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried.” Dan. 12:10. Only he who endures the trial will receive the crown of life. (James 1:12.)  
**“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.** We are admonished, “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**” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, 155).
2. Literary context of “saved” in COL 155:
  - a. “Saved” is used in sense of “eternally secure.”
  - b. “Saved” is equated with putting “confidence in self.”
  - c. “Saved” is equated with feeling that one is “secure against temptation,” hence will not or cannot fall.
  - d. Notice that right in the midst of all these cautions, occur the “positive” counsels (underlined above), **“Every one should be taught to cherish hope and faith”** and **“when we give ourselves to Christ” we may “know that He accepts us.”**
3. **A major insight into Ellen White’s thinking about righteousness by faith.**
  - a. This 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.
  - b. 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.
  - c. 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.
  - d. 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.

- e. 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.
- f. 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, you 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.
- g. 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 quoted 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 477.2).

### C. Literary Context, Example #2: *Selected Messages, Book 1, 314-315*

1. “We are never to rest in a satisfied condition, and cease to make advancement, saying, “I am saved.” When this idea is entertained, the motives for watchfulness, for prayers, for earnest endeavor to press onward to higher attainments, cease to exist. No sanctified tongue will be found uttering these words till Christ shall come, and we enter in through the gates into the city of God. Then, with the utmost propriety, we may give glory to God and to the Lamb for eternal deliverance. As long as man is full of weakness--for of himself he cannot save his soul--he should never dare to say, ‘I am saved.’

“It is not he that putteth on the armor that can boast of the victory; for he has the battle to fight and victory to win. It is he that endureth unto the end that shall be saved. The Lord says, ‘If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him’ (Heb. 10:38). If we do not go forward from victory to victory, the soul will draw back to perdition. . . . God's holy law is the only thing by which we can determine whether we are keeping His way or not. If we are disobedient, our characters are out of harmony with God's moral rule of government, and it is stating a falsehood to say, ‘I am saved.’ No one is saved who is a [deliberate, habitual] transgressor of the law of God, which is the foundation of His government in heaven and in earth.

“Those who ignorantly join the ranks of the enemy, and echo the words of their religious

teachers, in the desk, that the law of God is no longer binding upon the human family, will have light to discover their errors, if they will accept the evidence of God's Word" (1SM 314-315).

2. Literary context of "saved" in 1 SM 314-315:
  - a. Saying "I am saved" is equated with "rest[ing] in a satisfied condition," "ceas[ing] to make advancement," and assuming there is no need for spiritual growth or progress.
  - b. Saying "I am saved" is equated with the belief that one is beyond the possibility of falling or of being lost.
  - c. Saying "I am saved" is also associated with the teaching "that the law of God is no longer binding upon the human family."
  - d. Again, the caution is not against a legitimate biblical assurance, but against resting "in a satisfied condition" so that we "cease to make [spiritual] advancement."

**D. Historical-Theological Context, Example #1, *Review and Herald*, Nov. 1, 1892**

1. "It is essential to have faith in Jesus, and to believe you are saved through Him; but there is danger in taking the position that many do take in saying, "I am saved." Many have said: "You must do good works, and you will live"; but apart from Christ no one can do good works. **Many at the present day say, 'Believe, only believe, and live.'** Faith and works go together, believing and doing are blended. The Lord requires no less of the soul now, than He required of Adam in Paradise before he fell—perfect obedience, perfect righteousness" (*Review and Herald*, Nov. 1, 1892, in 1 SM 373).
2. Historical-theological context of "saved" in 1 SM 373
  - a. The true meaning of "saved" describes an experience that is "essential": "It is essential to have faith in Jesus, and to believe you are saved through Him."
  - b. The common misunderstanding of "saved" is that believing alone is sufficient, exempting one from the necessity of obedience.
  - c. Ellen White avoided both extremes. On the one hand, she never sees obedience as the ground of salvation. The only ground on which sinners can be justified is the atoning blood of Christ. On the other hand, she never sees justification as releasing the believer from the necessity of obedience. Thus she can place the contrasting statements in direct juxtaposition: (1) "Many have said: 'You must do good works, and you will live'; but apart from Christ no one can do good works." (2) "Many at the present day say, 'Believe, only believe, and live.' [But] Faith and works go together, believing and doing are blended. The Lord requires no less of the soul now, than He required of Adam in Paradise before he fell—perfect obedience, perfect righteousness."

**E. Historical-Theological Context, Example #2, *Signs of the Times*, Feb. 25, 1897**

3. "The doctrine is now largely taught that the Gospel of Christ has made the Law of God of no effect; that by "believing" we are released from the necessity of being doers of the word. But this is the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which Christ so unsparingly condemned. [Rev 2:2-6, quoted].  
"Those who are teaching this doctrine today have much to say in regard to faith and the righteousness of Christ; but they pervert the truth, and make it serve the cause of error. **They declare** that we have only to believe on Jesus Christ, and that faith is all-sufficient; that the righteousness of Christ is to be the sinner's credentials; **that this imputed righteousness fulfils the law for us, and that we are under no obligation to obey the law of God.** This class claim that Christ came to save sinners, and that he has saved them. **"I am saved," they will repeat over and over again. But are they saved while transgressing the law of Jehovah?--No; for the garments of Christ's righteousness are not a cloak for iniquity.** Such teaching is a gross deception, and Christ becomes to these persons a stumbling-block as he did to the Jews,—to the Jews because they would not receive him as their personal Saviour; to these professed believers in Christ, because **they separate Christ and the Law, and regard faith as a substitute for obedience**" (*Signs of the Times*, February 25, 1897, par. 6-7)
4. Historical-theological context of "saved" in *Signs of the Times*, Feb. 25, 1897.

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- a. This statement is directed against those who claim salvation while knowingly disregarding God's law.
- b. This statement is directed against those who claim that faith actually releases one from the obligation to keep the law.
- c. This statement does not deny assurance to those who depend on Christ's righteousness in the context of submission to His will as expressed in His law.

## IV. How to Retain True Assurance: Applying the Principles to Your Own Case

### A. Someone called me as I was working on this lecture and shared a recent experience in an Adventist church.

1. The preacher asked for a show of hands. "How many of you can say for sure that if the seven last plagues fell today, they wouldn't fall on you?"
2. Then he invited all to accept Jesus as their Savior "so that next time someone asks you if you are saved, you can raise your hand without hesitation."
3. Why does this syllogism from an Adventist pastor make me uncomfortable? Because it's based on presuppositions of "once saved, always saved."
4. If I accept Jesus today *and keep on* surrendering my life to Him on a regular basis so that I am still in a faithful relationship to Him next time somebody asks me, *then* I can then testify to my assurance. But if I don't exercise that faith and maintain that relationship on a daily basis, I will certainly lose it (see DA 82-83; 1 T 29.1).

### B. This section addresses four essentials:

1. The source of true assurance
2. Importance of a continual connection with Christ
3. Components of a continual connection with Christ
4. What happens to assurance when we sin?

### C. The Source of True Assurance: God's Initiative and Faithfulness

"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. 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 He will hold them by a hand that will never let go" (*Ministry of Healing*, 182.1).

### D. Importance of Continual Connection with Christ

"The only defense against evil is the indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith in His righteousness. Unless we become vitally connected with God, we can never resist the unhallowed effects of self-love, self-indulgence, and temptation to sin. We may leave off many bad habits, for the time we may part company with Satan; but **without a vital connection with God, through the surrender of ourselves to Him moment by moment, we shall be overcome. Without a personal acquaintance with Christ, and a continual communion, we are at the mercy of the enemy, and shall do his bidding in the end**" (DA 324.1).

"Every Christian will be assailed by the allurements of the world, the clamors of the carnal nature, and the direct temptations of Satan. No one is safe. No matter what our experience has been, no matter how high our station, we need to watch and pray continually. We must be daily controlled by the Spirit of God or we are controlled by Satan" (5T 102.1).

"The claims of Christ upon our service are new every day. However complete may have been our consecration at conversion, it will avail us nothing unless it be renewed daily; but a consecration that embraces the actual present is fresh, genuine, and acceptable to God" (RH, January 6, 1885 par. 6).

"None are living Christians unless they have a daily experience in the things of God and daily

practice self-denial, cheerfully bearing the cross and following Christ. Every living Christian will advance daily in the divine life. As he advances toward perfection, he experiences a conversion to God every day; and this conversion is not completed until he attains to perfection of Christian character, a full preparation for the finishing touch of immortality” (2T 505.1).

**E. Components of a Continual Connection with Christ** (see also Appendix)

“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 He will hold them by a hand that will never let go” (*Ministry of Healing*, 182.1).

“The very beginning of the evil was a neglect of **watchfulness** and **secret prayer**, then came a neglect of **other religious duties**, and thus the way was opened for all the sins that followed. Every Christian will be assailed by the allurements of the world, the clamors of the carnal nature, and the direct temptations of Satan. No one is safe. No matter what our experience has been, no matter how high our station, we need to **watch and pray continually**. We must be daily controlled by the Spirit of God or we are controlled by Satan” (5T 102.1).

“Many **attend religious services**, and are refreshed and comforted by the word of God; but through neglect of **meditation, watchfulness, and prayer**, they lose the blessing . . . . It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in **contemplation** of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus **dwel upon His great sacrifice for us**, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of **penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross**” (DA 83).

**F. What Happens to Assurance When We Sin?**

1. Many Christians have a roller-coaster religion, sometimes up, sometimes down. The primary cure for that experience is a consistent daily exercise of faith, especially through prayer, meditation, Bible study, and active service and witness.
2. But what about when we are trying to be consistent in our daily walk with God, yet fall into sin? Do we lose our salvation between the moment we commit sin and the moment we turn to God in repentance and receive anew His forgiveness and cleansing? 1 Jn 2:1 “If anyone sins, we *have* an Advocate with the Father.”
3. This question assumes one has already learned the lesson that a sure way to spiritual darkness and distance from God is the habit of putting off confession until the bedtime prayer! One essential ingredient of a continuing connection with Jesus is that when we realize we have sinned, we confess it immediately (see John 6:37 and 1 John 1:9).
4. The crux of the answer to #2 lies in the qualifying clause, “when we are trying to be consistent in our daily walk with God.” We think we are trying—yet, ultimately, only God knows the heart, for “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). We do not even know our own hearts, hence the prayer of Ps. 139:23-24. Only God knows our heart, hence only God can give us assurance (Rom 8:16, 26). We cannot truly do it for ourselves or for one another. But even “if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things” (1 John 3:20).
5. Ways that sin separates us from God
  - a. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 John 1:6; see also 1 John 3:6-9).
  - b. “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” (TM 367).
  - a. “The commission of a known sin silences the witnessing voice of the Spirit and separates the soul from God” (GC 472).
  - d. Cherished sin constitutes an idol.

“One woman . . . . became so addicted to smoking that when urged to give it up as an

unhealthful and defiling habit, she utterly refused to do so. She said, 'When the matter comes before my mind distinctly, that I must give up my pipe or lose heaven, then I say, "Farewell heaven;" I cannot surrender my pipe.' This woman only put into words that which many express by their actions. God, the maker of heaven and earth, He who created man and claims the whole heart, the entire affections, is held subordinate to the disgusting, defiling nuisance, tobacco"—Letter 8, 1893 (Te 63.2).

**6. Putting off surrender is choosing to live in sin.**

"Do not put off the work of forsaking your sins and seeking purity of heart through Jesus. Here is where thousands upon thousands have erred to their eternal loss. I will not here dwell upon the shortness and uncertainty of life; but **there is a terrible danger**--a danger not sufficiently understood--**in delaying to yield to the pleading voice of God's Holy Spirit, in choosing to live in sin; for such this delay really is.** Sin, however small it may be esteemed, can be indulged in only at the peril of infinite loss. **What we do not overcome, will overcome us** and work out our destruction. {SC 32.2} . . . Calvary stands as a memorial of the amazing sacrifice required to atone for the transgression of the divine law. Let us not regard sin as a trivial thing.

"Every act of transgression, every neglect or rejection of the grace of Christ, is reacting upon yourself; it is hardening the heart, depraving the will, benumbing the understanding, and not only making you less inclined to yield, but less capable of yielding, to the tender pleading of God's Holy Spirit.

"Many are quieting a troubled conscience with the thought that they can change a course of evil when they choose; that they can trifle with the invitations of mercy, and yet be again and again impressed. They think that after doing despite to the Spirit of grace, after casting their influence on the side of Satan, in a moment of terrible extremity they can change their course. But this is not so easily done. The experience, the education, of a lifetime, has so thoroughly molded the character that few then desire to receive the image of Jesus.

"**Even one wrong trait of character, one sinful desire, persistently cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel.** Every sinful indulgence strengthens the soul's aversion to God. The man who manifests an infidel hardihood, or a stolid indifference to divine truth, is but reaping the harvest of that which he has himself sown. In all the Bible there is not a more fearful warning against trifling with evil than the words of the wise man that the sinner 'shall be holden with the cords of his sins.' Proverbs 5:22.

"Christ is ready to set us free from sin, but He does not force the will; and if by persistent transgression the will itself is wholly bent on evil, and we do not desire to be set free, if we will not accept His grace, what more can He do? We have destroyed ourselves by our determined rejection of His love. 'Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.' 'Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.' 2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:7, 8" (SC 32-34).

**6. Encouragement that God will always accept the penitent believer, whatever our sins.**

- a. 1 Jn 1:9 and repentance.
- b. John 6:37
- c. SC 26:1-4

"Just here is a point on which many may err, and hence they fail of receiving the help that Christ desires to give them. They think that they cannot come to Christ unless they first repent, and that repentance prepares for the forgiveness of their sins. It is true that repentance does precede the forgiveness of sins; for it is only the broken and contrite heart that will feel the need of a Saviour. But must the sinner wait till he has repented before he can come to Jesus? Is repentance to be made an obstacle between the sinner and the Saviour?

"The Bible does not teach that the sinner must repent before he can heed the invitation of Christ, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28. It is the virtue that goes forth from Christ, that leads to genuine repentance. Peter made the matter clear in his statement to the Israelites when he said, "Him hath God

exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Acts 5:31. We can no more repent without the Spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience than we can be pardoned without Christ.

"Christ is the source of every right impulse. He is the only one that can implant in the heart enmity against sin. Every desire for truth and purity, every conviction of our own sinfulness, is an evidence that the Spirit is moving upon our hearts.

"Jesus has said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." John 12:32. Christ must be revealed to the sinner as the Saviour dying for the sins of the world; and as we behold the Lamb of God upon the cross of Calvary, the mystery of redemption begins to unfold to our minds and the goodness of God leads us to repentance. In dying for sinners, Christ manifested a love that is incomprehensible; and as the sinner beholds this love, it softens the heart, impresses the mind, and inspires contrition in the soul" (SC 26:1-4).

- d. "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.**
7. **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 reprov'd [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 [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, par. 7).
8. **Salvation is a gift which precedes and enables overcoming.**
  - a. "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).
  - b. "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, par. 15).
9. **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).**
  - a. "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).

- b. **“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 337.1).
- c. God knows our weaknesses. He 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).  
“The Lord knows you are young, and he will help you to do right, and give you grace to overcome every wrong, every evil. **You may not obtain the entire victory at once; but persevere, keep trying.** Say, I will do right, I will resist evil, and the Lord will help me” (AY 56).
- d. On the other hand, we are never to make our human weaknesses an excuse for not overcoming.

“How often we have read over the description of Christ's baptism with no thought that there was any particular significance in it for us. But it means everything to us. **It means that there can be no excuse for our living in alienation from God.** You may claim much leniency because of your human nature, of your temptations and trials, and seek to excuse yourself for sin because of inherited tendencies, but Christ gave himself in behalf of humanity, and there is no reason for failure. Christ bore temptations such as you will never be called upon to bear. He suffered as you will never suffer. He knew all your griefs, he has carried your sorrows. He has made it possible for you to be an overcomer. **Do not say it is impossible for you to overcome.** Do not say, "It is my nature to do thus and so, and I cannot do otherwise. I have inherited weaknesses that make me powerless before temptation." **We know you cannot overcome in your own strength; but help has been laid upon One who is mighty to save. When God gave his only begotten Son, he provided everything essential to your salvation.** And "he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (*Signs of the Times*, June 17, 1889, par. 11).

#### 10. Summary.

Those who daily walk with God, and daily strive to become all that He wants them to be, are covered by Christ's imputed righteousness as long as they continue to strive toward that goal. Heb 10:14, 38, is relevant here: “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified [those who stay in the sanctifying process through a persistent daily connection with Jesus]. . . . But if anyone draws back [gives up the daily struggle with self and sin], My soul has no pleasure in him.”

## V. Conclusion

- A. The principle: those who come to God in the way that Scripture has prescribed, have every right to claim His salvation, and He will keep them to the end. Those who claim assurance apart from coming to God in the way that Scripture has prescribed, are misapplying this principle, hence have a false assurance not based on Scripture.
- B. Ellen White's warnings against saying “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-

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confidence, presumption, and casual disobedience.

- C. She was just as positive about the appropriateness and even the necessity of assurance, understood in the context of true faith, daily connection with Christ, and obedience to the known will of God.

### D. Basis for Assurance

1. Christ's sacrifice is full and complete (John 3:16, 17; 2 Cor 5:14-21).
2. If I surrender to Christ today as much as I know how to, I can know today that I am a child of God (1 John 1:9).
3. If I continue to surrender day by day, I will continue in assurance (John 6:37; 15:4-6).
4. Dying with Christ (Gal 2:20; Rom 12:1) and living in Christ we receive power (Phil 4:13) to resist Satan (James 4:7-8; 1 Pet 5:6-10).
5. Faith and assurance must be grounded in and formed by the Word of God (Jer 17:9; 1 Jn 3:20) and the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:16).
6. True assurance is not self-centered but Christ-centered. "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day (2 Tim 1:12; Phil 1:6; 2:12-13).

### E. Sinner's 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).

### F. Believer's Daily Prayer:

"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.

"A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. **Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ.** Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. **So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ.** Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character. Christ in His self-denial, Christ in His humiliation, Christ in His purity and holiness, Christ in His matchless love—this is the subject for the soul's contemplation. It is by loving Him, copying Him, depending wholly upon Him, that you are to be transformed into His likeness" (SC 70-71).

## List of Appendices

### Appendix A

#### A Closer Look at the Popular Doctrine of “Once Saved, Always Saved”

### Appendix B

#### Spiritual Prescription: Promises for Personal Devotions

### Appendix A

#### 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).

“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.”**

- C. **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, or choose to turn away from Him.
- D. Ellen White’s Position  
“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. 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 **He will hold them by a hand that will never let go**” (*Ministry of Healing*, 182.1).