

# "Security," "Warnings" and the Gospel

By Edward Fudge

"...[you] who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."  
--1 Pet. 1:5, KJV.1

Peter speaks here of the Christian's salvation and of his security. He mentions its *certainty* ("[you] who are kept by the power of God") and its *conditionality* or means ("through faith"). How do we put these two elements together? There are two traditional answers. The Calvinist reads the words, "kept by the power of God," and preaches security. The Arminian-Wesleyan sees the next words, "through faith," and preaches perseverance.

It is not surprising that there should be some confusion here. God's ways are greater than we can anticipate, and His words are wiser than we can fully grasp. No matter how hard we try, we simply cannot fit all biblical truth into a logical "system." God's Word is greater than our comprehension; our minds cannot conceive a design intricate and grand enough to contain it all in logical order. We always end like the average man trying to fix an alarm clock, with extra parts and pieces and nowhere to put them. Not one of us has fully comprehended divine revelation, and neither has any group of men, whether we think of a denomination, a brotherhood or some historical movement. Through grace we perceive some of the truth the Sovereign God might even please to use us in recovering truth neglected by others but no one has seen the entire picture. All need to grow in their understanding, to gain a larger and truer perspective from which to better view the truth they already know.

## Two Popular Views: Original and Corrupted

**On the One Hand . . .** Whenever we talk about the "Calvinist" or "Arminian" view, we need to distinguish between the classical doctrines and their later popular corruptions.

While still in his thirties, John Calvin wrote his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which he dedicated in 1534 to the king of France on behalf of persecuted Reformed Christians in that country. Like Peter, Paul and John, Calvin turned, in the storm of oppression and affliction, to the sovereignty of God. Above it all, He reigns! What happens is with His permission, under His control and part of His eternal plan. God will have the last word! In this context Calvin stressed passages which speak of God's saving purpose, of His choosing a people in Christ before the world began. In view of man's sinfulness all good must surely begin with God, Calvin emphasized. In this way God receives all the glory and praise, whether for man's election, regeneration and calling, justification, perseverance or final glory. Surely no one can fault this emphasis or disagree with its essential truth.

But that is not to say that everything Calvin or his followers taught was equally scriptural and agreeable. Like us all, they wanted to harmonize biblical teaching, to make a single picture, to fit the pieces together. They seemed to begin with two pieces: man's sinfulness and inability, and God's holiness and power. As they studied the Scriptures, they put the other parts together around these. Even the most committed Calvinists admit that some pieces do not seem to fit. There are gaps in the picture. Some parts even look like they belong to a different puzzle. But the picture as a whole makes so much sense, and so very many of the pieces appear to fit this pattern, that Calvinists mark up the rest to human misunderstanding or divine silence.

1. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International version.

With time, some "Reformed" believers became discontented with this arrangement. The gaps were too gaping to suit them; the pile of "left-over" pieces was too large. They began to rearrange the parts, intending to keep the same truth they held already but in a different logical pattern. A leader among these was a Dutchman named Jacob Arminius. He also taught God's sovereignty and man's total need of grace, but he began to stress man's responsibility and activity. Numerous Calvinists began to "remonstrate" against the doctrines they had been taught. A special synod convened to discuss the matter of these Remonstrants, as they were called. From this Synod of Dort (Dortrecht) came the Canons of Dort, which arranged fundamental Calvinistic doctrine under five heads. These were: (1) unconditional election and reprobation, (2) limited (definite or specific) atonement, (3) total depravity of man, (4) irresistible grace or effectual calling, and (5) perseverance of the saints. In English the first letters of these five points spelled ULTIP, but someone soon rearranged them to make TULIP, and TULIP it has been ever since.

In classical Reformed theology the "perseverance of the saints" is intended both to give confidence to believers and to stress the need for continuing in faith and good works. Those whom God foreknew, the doctrine affirms, *will persevere* till the end. If a man falls from a life of faith and piety, we can have no assurance that he is among the elect. But those who continue to look to Christ can be assured that He will keep them; and as they continue in faith they have assurance that they are among those God foreknew, whom He will certainly one day glorify. This doctrine was a summary or paraphrase of Paul's teaching in Romans 8:28-31 or of Jesus' teaching in John 6:37-40. It had great practical value in encouraging believers under persecution, and it was understood by them to speak of things primarily from God's point of view.

The Puritans and other immigrants brought Calvinism to America. With the passing of years, many of these gradually drifted from their Reformed theology. With most, the last surviving point has been the doctrine of "perseverance," and it has suffered a great deal of wear through the centuries. The original doctrine of the "perseverance of the saints" has changed in popular usage to a doctrine, found neither in the Bible nor in the Reformers, of "once saved, always saved." This concept says that when a person accepts Christ as personal Saviour, he is given salvation and eternal life in such a way that he can never lose it, no matter what. He is eternally secure.

Responsible Bible teachers who hold this doctrine stress that the person who is truly saved will want to do right, will be sorry when he does wrong, and can never turn to a life of sin with an easy conscience. Unfortunately, they are not the ones who have done most of the teaching. As a result, millions of believers, counted in the popular "born-again" constituency of Americans, have been grounded from the time of their conversion in the conviction that salvation is in their pocket. Furthermore, these converts believe that their pocket is securely zipped and the handle has been removed so that it cannot be unzipped.

A few totally irresponsible preachers have even affirmed to the embarrassment of the great majority holding to this kind of "eternal security" that a man could turn completely away from Christ to a life of profligate sin and still have complete assurance of salvation. Such wicked foolishness has brought swift reaction, which it should, and some of that reaction has zealously gone too far, which it should not.

**And On the Other . . .** When Arminius and his followers tried to modify the Calvinism of their day, they were concerned to protect gospel assurance against the abuse of the licentious and the lawless. They believed that all who trusted in Christ could find strong comfort and security in Him. Much later, John Wesley, the Anglican evangelist and father of Methodism, made the same point. Wesley, too, stressed "heart assurance," but he always stressed it in connection with wholehearted trust in Jesus as Saviour. Assurance is God's blessed gift according to all these men, but the condition for assurance is persevering faith. They were simply rephrasing passages of Scripture like those scattered through Hebrews, 1 Corinthians 10, and the words "kept . . . through faith" in our text at the head of this article. They also stressed biblical truth.

Thus, on one side of the assurance controversy are those who say that salvation comes when one accepts Christ as personal Saviour, and that once saved, he can never be lost. This "once saved, always saved" viewpoint is sometimes called "Calvinism" by friend and foe alike, although neither Calvin nor the Reformed theologians ever taught it. Instead of "once saved, always saved," with emphasis on a single moment of decision, they taught the "perseverance of the saints," meaning that the truly elect would most certainly persevere in faith and piety to the end of life.

The second position, sometimes called "Arminian" or "Wesleyan" for purposes of clarity and identification, says that salvation is conditional on true faith in the beginning and until the end.

### **The Gospel: Salvation in Christ Is Finished and Secured Outside of Us, for Us**

Let us now examine this controversy in the light of the gospel. First, we will see how the biblical gospel places salvation in actual person of Jesus Christ both in His *earning* and accomplishing it, and in His *receiving* it securely in His own person at God's right hand in heaven.

Second, we will beam the light of this objective, outside-of-me gospel on the controversy surrounding the doctrine of "once saved, always saved." As we do that, we will find that both sides are actually sharing an erroneous foundation, though they differ in how they should build on it. We will also find that both sides contend for basic biblical truth, though they disagree on which biblical truth they shall stress. Finally, as we turn the gospel searchlight on the various proof-texts, we will discover that they all have a proper place but only in the greater picture of the finished work of Jesus. We will close with some practical observations on the valuable use of both sets of scriptures for those who are trusting in Jesus alone for their salvation and standing with God.

### **Salvation Earned Personally in Jesus, Representatively for Us.**

By the sin of Adam, our first father, mankind fell from his intended dominion over creation and became a slave to sin under the specter of death. Paul discusses Adam's role as representative of the race in this matter in Romans 5:12-21. The apostle points out that Jesus, too, was a representative man, the second Adam. Both Adam and Jesus were themselves "one man," but what each did counted for "many," the first for ruin, the second for recovery. Paul explains that Jesus, *like* Adam, was legal proxy for those He represented; but Jesus, *unlike* Adam, conquered Satan and regained man's lost estate. Not only this, but Christ's work earned man "much more" than Adam's error lost. As a result, man is freed from sin's power in Christ, as well as death's fear, to serve God anew in the strength of righteousness and hope of personal life forever.

The writer of Hebrews also speaks of man's intended glory in Hebrews 2:5-10, where he quotes Psalm 8 to show God's original plan for the human creature. He then preaches a short sermon on the psalm, noting that the phrase, "He put *all* things" under man's feet, leaves no room for exceptions. Yet we do not now see man in this exalted position. "But," he says and this is his clincher "we see *Jesus*." Jesus is the new Adam. The representative Man, the Man already in heaven, on whose account we may truthfully say that we do see man in the position of dominion over "all things." Throughout this Epistle the author presents Jesus as High Priest for His people. Above all else, the high priest was a man "for others," a proxy, a representative, a substitute, who stood for his people in all he did before God and whose own safe return from the place of atonement signified as well the acceptance and forgiveness of all his people.

The Gospels make the same point clear both to Jews (Matthew) and to Gentiles (Luke). Matthew shows us Jesus as He traces the steps of ancient Israel. He, too, is God's Son called out of Egypt (Matt. 2:15; Hosea 11:1). He, too, goes through the water (Matt. 3:13-17; Ex. 14), then into the wilderness under the leading of the Spirit (Matt. 4:1; Ex. 15:22). There Jesus, too, hungers for forty

days and nights and is tested to see if He will obey God or not (Matt. 4:2-11; Deut. 8:1-3). He then goes immediately (in Matthew's account) to a mountain, where He gives what many consider the antitype of the law at Sinai (Matt. 5:1, 2; Ex. 19, 20). After the first four introductory chapters, Matthew arranges his Gospel in five major divisions, each containing a sermon or discourse of Jesus followed by a section of narrative. This arrangement must strike the Hebrew mind with special force, fitting a pattern of the Pentateuch or Five Books of Moses. (All five discourses concern some aspect of the kingdom and are found in Matthew 5-7, 10, 13, 18 and 24-25.)

Luke's Gospel is written for Gentiles, and he shows Jesus as the second Adam, who brings mankind to a new beginning. Luke omits the kingly genealogy recorded by Matthew, citing instead an apparent bloodline that goes all the way back to "Adam the son of God" (Luke 3:23-38). Luke places this genealogy, significantly, just after Jesus' baptism, at which time he had shown Jesus coming with "all the people" to stand in the sinner's line at the Jordan. The point is plain. Although He is without sin, Jesus here identifies fully with His people. He is a man among men the man who is Man.. Taken together, Matthew and Luke give a powerful commentary on Paul's statement in Galatians 4:4 that the Son of God came "born of a woman, born under the law." Luke shows us Jesus, our fleshly kin, the physical son of an earthly mother. Matthew shows us Jesus, the descendant of Abraham and David, the true Israel and spiritual son of the Torah. In Luke Jesus is second Adam; in Matthew He is second Israel. He fulfills all that was previously lacking, bringing both covenantal man (Adam) and covenantal people (Israel), through perfect obedience, to their intended covenantal reward and peace with God.

All that Jesus did, therefore, He did for His people. Like David facing Goliath on behalf of all Israel, He was His people's Representative, Champion and only hope. On the outcome of His struggle their destiny depended. We do not need to stop here to consider the Calvinist-Wesleyan controversy concerning those He represented. Both schools can agree that the gospel is to be preached without discrimination to all and that all who truly believe it may see Christ as the One who lived and died in their stead. By His perfect obedience Jesus fulfilled all God's laws for man, and by His atoning death He removed the final barrier preventing access to God. His perfect doing and His perfect dying gave God all He ever wanted from man and gave man all He ever could desire from God. Jesus was therefore both "merciful and faithful," able to show mercy to sinful man because He first was completely faithful in the covenant with God. In John's Gospel Jesus claims to be the true ladder or stairway uniting God and man in fulfillment of the dream of the patriarch Jacob (John 1:51; 3:13; 6:38, 42). Paul makes the same point more than once in speaking of Jesus as the One who first "descended" and then "ascended" (Rom. 10:6, 7; Eph. 4:8-10).

From the very beginning in Eden, fellowship with God was dependent on perfect obedience. Adam disobeyed, fellowship was destroyed, and death followed. In Israel God "created" another covenantal "son," and He gave Israel the same rule. "Do this and you shall live" (cf. Lev. 18:5). But Israel also disobeyed, broke the covenant and lost its "Eden." The prophets looked for One who would accomplish what Israel and Adam had failed to accomplish. Jesus fulfilled every prophetic expectation and patriarchal dream. He satisfied every moral law and personified every ceremonial law, weaving a spotless robe of righteousness by a sinless life, and then brought it to God in His own sacrificial blood. In this Jesus was both atonement-offering and officiating Priest. The writer of Hebrews goes even further to say that Jesus rose again to become Surety and Executor of His own testament, guaranteeing the inheritance for all His beneficiaries (Heb. 9:15). He lived for us, He died for us, He rose for us, and He entered judgment for us. Now He has ascended to heaven for us, where He sits (His work completed) as our Mediator. By His very presence there, Jesus pleads the case of all His people. "What is this Man doing in heaven?" the angels (or the Accuser) might ask. To answer that question is to speak on behalf of those who come to God through Him.

The work that accomplished salvation was done in the personal experience of Jesus of Nazareth. That work was outside of us, for us. The "saving history" is that record of events which happened to Him not to us. Nothing in our earthly experience is any part of that sacred history; nothing in our doing

or dying is any part of that doing and dying which satisfied the law, atoned for sin and reconciled God and man. The apostles were chosen to be special ambassadors and eyewitnesses of God's saving acts on which the new covenant rested. For this reason they had to give personal witness of Jesus' life from His baptism by John to His ascension, for this was the period of God's greatest exodus and saving deeds (Acts 1:21, 22).

### **Salvation Received Personally in Jesus, Representatively for Us.**

The *reward* of salvation also is seen now only in the personal experience of Jesus of Nazareth. Only He has met man's appointment "once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Only He has come from the judgment bar with God's approval. Only He has ascended into heaven and been given glory and immortality at God's right hand forevermore. In all the universe there is only one Man who has pleased God. There is only one Man who has earned a place in God's presence. There is only one Man who has been given a glorified, immortal body, the fullness of eternal life. But all that has happened to one Man, and that Man is Jesus of Nazareth. In Him, therefore, we see man's salvation earned and rewarded. But we do not see either of these anywhere else, no matter where we may look. Since all that happened to Jesus happened out of our own personal experience, our own sight and hearing, it happened outside of us. But because Jesus was our Representative before God, the second Adam, it all happened for us. Because it is outside of us, for us, the whole matter of salvation must of necessity be for us a matter of faith, not of sight. This is the point we have briefly noticed already in Hebrews 2. "We do not yet see" all things subjected to man. "But" by faith "we see Jesus" (Heb. 2:8, 9, RSV). We see salvation earned only as we see it earned in Jesus personally. We do not see it earned anywhere else or in the personal experience of anyone else. In the same way, we see salvation received only as we see it received in Jesus personally. Salvation in its fullness immortality in a resurrected and glorified body prepared to live forever in God's presence has come as yet only to one Man. Many others anticipate it, expect it, desire it and wait for it with all the assurance of God's promises and the earnest of the indwelling Spirit, but not one of them personally enjoys it yet in actual bodily experience. For Jesus it is a matter of sight. For all others it is yet a matter of faith.

Peter tells us the same thing in his first Epistle. We have been begotten again by Christ's resurrection, he says, to a living hope (1 Pet. 1:3). Our salvation is reserved for us in heaven, ready to be revealed at the last day (1 Pet. 1:4, 5). Now we wait for it and joyfully *believe* even while we suffer for though we do not see Jesus, we love Him nonetheless and believe what He has promised (1 Pet. 1:6-9).

John also says that the reward of salvation is for us a matter of faith, not of sight. We do not know "what we shall be," he writes, but we are confident that when He appears "we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2). Paul repeatedly speaks of believers as those who wait for Jesus (1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:20;

1 Thess. 1:10). We are saved "in hope," he tells the Romans, but "hope" means that we do not yet see our salvation which is still future in our own bodily experience (Rom. 8:24, 25, NASB). Even the Holy Spirit, who is the first-fruits of our salvation, testifies to this, for He is given to help us while we wait in our own weakness (Rom.8:23, 26).

Although New Testament writers agree that only Jesus has personally received the reward of salvation as yet, they also commonly testify that His reward is the assurance of our own. What He did, He did as our Representative, and the outcome of His life is the pattern of what we may also expect. Because He lives, we shall live (1 Cor. 15:45-49; 1 Thess. 4:14). Jesus suffered and entered glory, Peter repeatedly says. Therefore we confidently endure suffering, knowing that glory awaits us as well (1 Pet. 1:11; 4:13; 5:10). Christ is the Head and His people are the body, Paul explains. But the Head has risen and gone into heaven. Therefore the body will one day join Him there, for it is His "fullness" and He would be incomplete without it (Eph. 1:20-23). By representation, Paul goes on to say in the next verses, we are already risen, ascended and seated in heaven, for God made us alive

in Christ, raised us up in Christ and seated us in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 2:5, 6). But because these experiences are His own historically and not yet ours, we enjoy all these blessings now only through *faith* (Eph. 2:8). When Jesus returns, they will be ours in our own possession, for our own bodily experience, no longer by faith but then by sight.

We must never forget this central message of the gospel. All we now see or know of salvation, we see by *faith*, as by faith we know it to be true of Jesus, our Representative. Evangelicals have long emphasized this truth when speaking of the "earning" or "accomplishing" of salvation. But many have had dimmer vision on this point when speaking of the "receiving" or "experiencing" of salvation. This becomes evident in the controversy concerning "once saved, always saved." It will do us all good, therefore, to turn the light of the "outside of me, for me" gospel on this particular discussion. We will not ask either side to abandon any truth it presently holds. Rather we will enforce, appreciate and agree with all the proof-texts offered by both sides. And in the gospel light of salvation in Christ, we can all come to see that what we already knew was correct so far as it went but incorrect taken alone.

## The Controversy in the Light of the Gospel

### An Error in Common: "Salvation in My Pocket."

It might come as a surprise to those on both sides of the "once saved, always saved" controversy (in its contemporary, popularized form), but they actually have a great deal in common. If one turns on the spotlight of the Christ-centered gospel, the brilliant rays of salvation outside-of-me make that common ground obvious. For the argument on both sides of the battle rests on the same faulty conception. Salvation is made "conditional" in such a sense that it has become in essence "salvation in my pocket" instead of "salvation outside of me, for me." The salvation which the New Testament writers reserve securely in the person of Christ in heaven has been transmitted through a conversion experience" to weak and mortal men on earth. That is the root of the entire controversy in its present form. So long as salvation is understood to be *only by faith*, outside of me, in the representative person of Jesus in heaven, there is no question about its security. It is just as secure as He is and He is clothed in an immortal resurrection body, seated in glory at God's right hand! But as soon as we begin to make salvation part of our present experience other than by faith, we subject it to the immediate question of its security. This is what has happened in the matter of once saved, always saved." (The Reformation doctrine of the perseverance of the saints did not fall into this error, for it spoke of a people God foreknew, whom He would enable to persevere, not of a salvation delivered to man now at a single moment of decision to be irrevocably his apart from continuance in well doing.)

Those who say the Christian *cannot* fall picture him receiving salvation securely in his pocket. He can say with confidence, "I *have* salvation and I *cannot lose it*." Those who say the Christian *can* fall and be lost picture him at conversion as receiving salvation in his pocket, but the pocket is open at the top. With a measure of care, the treasure is secure. It will not accidentally fall out, and no one else can take it from him. But through careless neglect or the Christian's own willful decision, it might be lost. The two sides completely *disagree* on the security of the treasure in the pocket, yet just as certainly they *agree* in picturing it as in the pocket. But this idea of "salvation in my pocket" is far different from the New Testament teaching of "salvation in Christ in heaven," and it is the basic misunderstanding on both sides. Until that common error is corrected, the two sides are destined to a stalemate as they continue to bombard one another with proof-texts which do not assume their common misconception and which neither side is hearing. Both sides of this contemporary discussion have drastically altered the biblical picture. Instead of salvation being in *Christ's* person, it has become in *my* person. Instead of being securely in *heaven*, it has been brought to *earth*, where its security becomes a vital question. Instead of being solely by *faith*, it has become partly by *sight*, on the condition "faith." Instead of faith seeing it *outside me* in the person of Jesus yet for me because He is my legal Representative, faith has become a conditional work by which I take hold of salvation *in me* through the grace of Christ, who made it all possible. The fundamental biblical notion of walking by *faith* and not by *sight* has been eroded in the interest of personal experience, present possession and practical effectiveness.

Throughout the Bible we find that those who believe God's promises enter the curious position of "already" enjoying their reward though they have "not yet" received it. There is a creative tension between these two elements just as there is between the idea that the New Age has already begun even while the Present Age continues to run down. But there is no conflict and the biblical models of faith never give evidence of trying to harmonize the tension as though the two things were incompatible. God tells Abraham, "A father of many nations have I made you," though Abraham has not one heir and no human prospects of any. But Abraham *believes* God and is counted righteous (Gen. 17:5; Rom. 4:17, 19-22). The patriarchs died without receiving their promised city, but the writer of Hebrews says they saw it and embraced it (Heb. 11:13-16). They did this by faith. Jesus Christ Himself was given a people to share His glory, even before the world began (John 6:37, 39; 17:2, 24). But as He walked to the cross, one apostle had betrayed Him, another had denied Him three times, and nine of the rest had fled for their lives.

One of the most agonizing letters the apostle Paul ever wrote was surely the Epistle we know as 2 Corinthians. It was prompted primarily by opponents who preached "glory in my pocket" and derided Paul because he and his gospel were battered, bruised and bleeding. Peter's first general Epistle calls on Christians to face suffering and death for Christ in apparent defeat because they can see by *faith* that Christ is in heaven and that their salvation is secure in Him, waiting to be revealed to them at the proper time. Perhaps "the most revealing book of the Bible" on this point (as Vernard Eller has titled his commentary on the Apocalypse) is Revelation. "The revelation of *Jesus Christ*" opens with the now-glorified Christ, who came to heaven as the slaughtered Lamb. The book's very title, taken from its opening words, points the suffering witness church on earth to Him who died a forsaken and brutal death in apparent defeat yet was supremely vindicated in God's own time to be Prince of the kings of the earth! "We walk by faith," Paul stressed, "not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). Yet this very faith, he says on either side of that statement, gives us "good courage" (2 Cor. 5:6, 8, RSV). So must it ever be.

### **The Biblical Picture of Conversion.**

If the Bible does not picture conversion as "salvation in my pocket," how does it invite us to think. The key is Christ. The gospel is the story of Christ's experiences outside of us, for us. In the gospel we see Jesus, our Representative, satisfying God's law in our name. We see Jesus, our Representative, cursed and bearing God's wrath in our name. We see Jesus, our Representative, buried out of sight, carrying our sins far away. We see Jesus, our Representative, raised again because of our having been set right with God. We see Jesus, our Representative, ascending to heaven, where He enters God's presence for us. And if we will believe that He did all this for us--not for Himself, not for angels, but for Abraham's descendants of faith we will see that when He obeyed God, we obeyed God. When He died, we died. When He was buried, we were buried. When He rose, we rose. When He ascended and received glory, we ascended and received glory. Yet very clearly we are still on earth, in our mortal bodies, subject to temptation and full of sin. How can this be? It happened to us representatively in Him. It was "outside of me, for me." How easy it is to say these words and phrases yet miss so much of their point. But to believe the gospel is to believe this very thing.

To believe that Jesus' experiences transpired *for* me, in my name, is to know "joy and peace in believing" and to "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13, NASB). It is, like Abraham and Sarah, to rest believing in what God says, confident that His word of promise is even more solid ground than our own experiences. It is to join the patriarchs, who see the inheritance afar off, embrace it, confess to be pilgrims and die without having received it. It enables us to persevere like Moses, die like Joseph, fight like Barak, work like Samuel and conquer like Gideon and David. Such faith is no mere vapor of imagination; it gives *substance* to hope. It is no game of make-believe; it is the *evidence* of things we cannot see. It can scoff at torture and reject temporal deliverance for something far better. It sees Jesus on the cross forgiveness on His lips and joy in His heart, confident

that God's *promises* in the pocket are a treasure beside which all earthly circumstances fade like fog. And it sees Jesus at God's right hand personally experiencing, inherently possessing, bodily enjoying all that had thrilled His heart in prospect when as yet it was only "by faith" (Heb. 10:38-12:2).

Conversion means that the sinner's eyes are opened by grace and focused to see by faith (2 Cor. 4:6). It means that the good news of Jesus-for-me, accompanied by the command to repent and believe the good news, has taken possession of my innermost self. When I receive this word of promise and it is "mixed with faith" (Heb. 4:2), I find a new kind of life, become a new person, see everything different than before. When I believe this good news of God's saving work for me in the person of Jesus, I can ask God in gospel baptism for a clear *conscience* on the basis of what I now see by faith to be true in *Jesus*, my Representative (Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). God promises to give the Holy Spirit in baptism as a covenantal *seal* of all He has promised (Acts 2:38; 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; Eph. 1:13, 14). Baptism is a way of saying "Amen" to God's promises. Baptism thus becomes the historical line of demarcation from my past and from the world, and in it I am "saved" from that old world and its perverse generation (Acts 2:40; 1 Pet. 3:20, 21).

By His perfect doing and dying, Jesus' blood has become the symbol of my forgiveness. His blood is therefore poured out for "remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28). Because faith is seeing Jesus as "for me" in all He did and suffered, it enables me to rejoice in what God has done for me in Jesus. Faith is also, therefore, for "remission of sins" (Acts 10:43), but only as the means by which I see Jesus and His finished work. Gospel baptism in water is faith's expression in the New Testament (Matt. 28:19; Acts 22:16; Col. 2:12). Because it is faith expressed, it, too, is for "remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). But baptism is not for "remission of sins" apart from faith, even as faith is not apart from Christ. The New Testament pictures the three together. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).

Because it views faith and baptism as parts of a single piece, the New Testament speaks of the blessings Christ has earned as being ours now by faith and by baptism. Both are joined, therefore, to salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 16:31), forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 10:43) and receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:2, 14). As a believer, I am still the same person in height and weight. I appear the same to all the senses, whether sight, smell, taste, touch or sound. What has happened has happened outside of me, for me. Christ is my new life, righteousness, redemption and inheritance. Because He is in heaven, so now are my life, righteousness, redemption and inheritance. When He comes again, my life will be revealed, my righteousness will become apparent, my redemption will be fulfilled, and my inheritance will become mine in actual possession forever. Until then all these things are mine by faith only, for they are mine only in the person of Jesus, my Representative, and He is outside of me, for me.

### **The Proper Use of Both Sets of Proof-Texts.**

This gospel perspective does not diminish the value of any Scripture used by either side of the present argument over "security." It instead brings all the proof-texts into focus because it centers them on Jesus Christ, who is the focal point of all God's revelation.

*"Security" Scriptures Tell Us to Look to Jesus.* Every passage brought forward by those who argue that the Christian can never be lost may be listed here. But not one of those texts places any confidence in the man's own experience of "receiving Christ" or being "born again" or "getting saved" so that he is encouraged to look to those events to find assurance or security. Rather, these passages all point him to God's faithfulness, demonstrated by the salvation already secured in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Texts such as Romans 8:28-32, which speak of God's sovereignty, point him to Jesus, for only Jesus has already been justified before God's judgment bar and glorified at His right hand. By *faith* the Christian sees himself where Christ is because Christ is his Representative. If he takes his eyes off Christ, he sees nothing comforting anywhere. As Corrie Ten Boom once put it, "Look around and be distressed; look within and be depressed; look at Jesus and be at rest." Spurgeon put it like this: "I looked at Jesus, and the dove of peace flew into my heart. I looked at the dove of peace, and it flew away." Saving faith means keeping the eye on Jesus (Heb.12:2).

Scriptures like John 5:24, John 6:37, 47 and John 10:27-29 point the believer to the power and faithfulness of Jesus, his Saviour, and assure him that Christ will never forsake or turn away the one who looks in faith to Him. They do not give a hint that the professing Christian can place any confidence in his initial conversion experience or expect to find "salvation in his pocket." Satan cannot overpower Jesus and snatch the believer away from Him ever. But how does the believer know this? Because Jesus has overcome Satan, risen again and is seated at God's right hand in heaven. The *believer* can always have assurance, for *belief* is looking to *Jesus*. But there is no passage of Scripture that says a "convert" may always have confidence of his standing with God with or without continuing faith.

Any time one looks in true faith to God's Son, he can find assurance that warms his heart from his conversion to the day of his death (John 3:14, 15; Rom. 5:1; 15:13). If he ceases looking at Jesus to turn his gaze anywhere else, he simply finds no basis for assurance. The saving experiences of Jesus Christ are his only grounds for peace in His earning salvation and in His receiving salvation. Apart from Jesus, seen by the vision of faith, there is nothing in the Christian's own history to assure him that salvation is either earned or received or that it ever can be. The personal experience of Jesus Christ is the historical verification of God's promises and faithfulness, and we rest on Christ's personal experience by faith.

Passages throughout 1 John about the believer having life, or those like 1 Peter 1:5, which say we are "kept by the power of God through faith," fit this picture as well. The key words are "believe" and "faith." It is not that "faith" is a conditional work, something man does once and checks off the list. Security is not a blessing *merited* by "believing," nor is *assurance* something God exchanges for the price of "faith." *Faith is seeing Jesus as "for me"*. Every time I see Him in *my* place, I can see myself in *His* place, and assurance is the inevitable result!

The "assurance" passages are intended to take our eyes off ourselves and fix them on Jesus. They remind us that our destiny is not dependent on our own weakness, our own frailties, our own imperfect performance or our own condemning record. They tell us again and again to "put no confidence in the flesh," to "keep our eyes on Jesus," to "look to Him and be saved." They rebuke every pretension of man at spiritual success. They throw to the ground every proud thought of man's autonomous will or strength. They stand in constant judgment over every attempt we make to be self-sufficient. God tells us in them to look to Jesus in every storm and wave of life, and stand once more. All we need to do is look. He will make us stand (Matt. 10:27-32; Rom. 14:4; Jude 24, 25).

*"Warning" Words Tell Us to Look to Jesus.* Every passage brought forward as proof by those who say the Christian can be lost are also telling us to keep our eyes on Jesus. Not one word of Scripture can be found which implies that Jesus will ever disappoint anyone who trusts in Him. The exact opposite is repeatedly stated throughout the Bible (Ps. 25:2, 3; Isa. 28:16; Rom. 10:11). The "warning" passages are written to tell us to keep our eyes on Jesus, for we can find no hopeful sight anywhere else. They speak to the Christian who is beginning to be puffed up, who is forgetting that all he possesses now is his by *faith* and not by *sight*. They rebuke pride, condemn indifference and slothfulness, and encourage steadfastness. No such passage of Scripture should give the impression that the work on which our salvation rests is unfinished or that Jesus only did part of that work and we must somehow labor to complete what He lacked. No such word from God suggests that our salvation is on shaky ground. They rather point us to the certainty of God's promise, which has been historically verified in the personal, bodily experience of Jesus Christ, our Representative. They tell us that Israel fell in the wilderness through unbelief and what an unnecessary tragedy that was! (1 Cor. 9:24-10:13). They point to Jesus' perfect work, on which we *may* place total confidence (Col. 1:19-23). They urge us to keep our eyes on Jesus, where we may find absolute assurance and peace by faith (Rom. 11:20-23; Heb. 3:1-4:16). Anything else we might look at can provide, at best, a delusive and temporary comfort, for all else is built on shifting sand. By making this clear to the Christian, Scripture gives him something to glory in that is solid, and a basis for peace that is secure.

Both sets of passages are actually telling us the same thing, though under different circumstances. The "assurance passages find us when we are discouraged, overwhelmed or persecuted, and say: "Don't look at yourself look to Jesus! See in Him your secured salvation! Trust Him and you'll never be disappointed!" The "warning" passages come to us when we are puffed up, self-satisfied, indifferent or lazy, and say to us: "Don't look at yourself look to Jesus! See in Him your secured salvation! Trust Him and you will never be disappointed!" At two opposite times of our need these two sets of scriptures bring the same message and it is the message which lies at the heart of the gospel.

Whenever men separate the "security texts from the gospel of salvation "outside of me, for me," they take salvation from its secured place in Christ in heaven and imagine a security in the believer on earth. They remove salvation's true security, based on Christ's perfect, finished work, and invent a security based on man's own experience of conversion or good works.

On the other hand, whenever men separate the "warning" passages from the gospel of salvation "outside of me, for me," they replace the finished salvation represented by Christ in heaven with an incomplete salvation represented by the Christian on earth. They remove the absoluteness of His secure position and replace it with the precariousness of man's own frailties. In the name of encouraging diligence they undercut the greatest reason for diligence the right standing with God which the believer may have by faith as he sees it personified in Jesus Christ, his Representative.

Both sides think they are friends of the gospel; but by such a misuse of their respective proof-texts, both are actually being unwitting spiritual termites eating away at its very foundation. The gospel's word is the same to both alike: "Don't look at yourself look to Jesus! See in Him your secured salvation! Trust Him and you will never be disappointed!"