

The High Calling

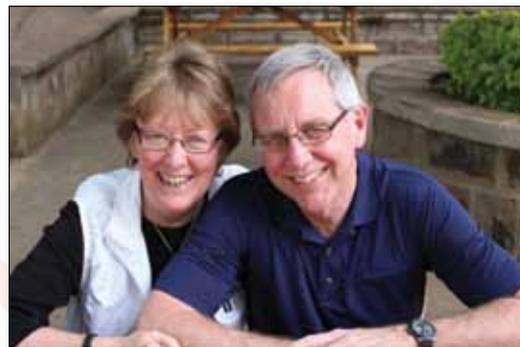
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Blessed Assurance

By Stan Key

I remember as a young pastor being told by an older saint that a minister's job description really consists of only two basic responsibilities: 1) to comfort the afflicted, and 2) to afflict the comfortable. Anyone who has ever served in pastoral ministry recognizes the sober truth contained in this playful statement.

Preaching the gospel is serious business. Every Sunday morning, the preacher feels the fresh breezes of heaven on the one hand and smells the fiery smoke of hell on the other. The stakes could not be higher! There are some in the congregation who desperately need a word of peace and reassurance: "God loves you; all is well." But there are others who need to have the hell scared out of them—literally: "Repent, before it is too late." To stand in the pulpit and leave sinners comfortable in their sins



or to instill doubt and discouragement in those who are truly born of God is to commit pastoral malpractice of the worst kind!

Perhaps no book in the New Testament has a clearer message on how to preach the doctrine of assurance than 1 John. In fact, this is the very reason John wrote this little epistle: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you

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Slack Abiding

By Robert E. Coleman



In his excellent book *The Heart of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), Robert Coleman tackles the delicate issue of backsliding. Treating the issue with both a theologian's head and a pastor's heart, Coleman enables us to better understand the nuanced precision of what the Bible actually says. This article is a slightly edited abridgement taken from Chapter 14, "Perseverance of the Saints" (199–203).

What is called backsliding results from unfaithfulness to Christ, or as someone has said, backsliding comes through slack abiding, meaning it is a willful act of disregarding the will of God. Having begun in the Spirit, one turns aside and again starts to walk in the flesh (Gal 6:1). This can happen to the best of people. Remember how even Peter in his weakness three times denied his Lord (Mk 14:66–72).

Knowing our human weakness and remembering the warnings of Scripture, we should pray to avoid temptation (Mt 6:13). God is not the source of temptation (Jas 1:13) and he will not permit anyone to be tempted more than our ability to endure (1 Cor 10:13). Because our Lord has been through it all, in ways

more devious than our own, yet never having sinned, we can be sure that he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb 2:18; 2 Pt 2:9). But if we yield to sin, inevitably we will backslide. Disobedience breaks fellowship with Christ (1 Jn 1:6–7). By not walking in his light, the joyous sense of his presence loses its freshness, and eventually, if not corrected, impacts assurance of salvation.

Now the question must be asked: Does the loss of fellowship also mean the loss of a relationship with the Savior? Evangelical interpretations of security, with many variations, answer differently the question of the saint's perseverance. Basically, they come down to two options: unconditional security and conditional security.

Unconditional Security

The classical Reformed position holds that the truly converted will be kept secure in their faith by the power of God until the end of their lives. Fellowship with Christ can be lost and often is, but never a relationship. A person once born of the Spirit is forever a child of God.

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The Witness of the Spirit

By Samuel Logan Brengle (1860–1936)



Samuel Logan Brengle was a commissioner in The Salvation Army and a prominent author, teacher, and preacher focusing especially on the doctrine and practice of Christian holiness. The following article is a slightly edited abridgement of a chapter entitled “The Witness of the Spirit” taken from his book *When the Holy Ghost Is Come* (Atlanta: The Salvation Army, 1976: 23–30).

How can I know that I am accepted by God? The Bible declares God’s love for sinners and reveals his offer of mercy to me on the condition that I repent of my sins and believe on Jesus Christ, taking up my cross to follow him. But how can I know that I have met these conditions? How can I be sure that I am truly saved?

The Bible cannot tell me this because it can only tell me what to do. It does not tell me when I have done it any more than a road sign pointing out the highway that

**“Be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.”
(2 Peter 1:10)**



leads to a certain city tells me when I have reached that city. My spiritual leaders and friends cannot tell me this because they cannot read my heart nor can they know what God really thinks of me. They can assure me that if I repent, believe, and obey, God will accept me. But beyond that they cannot go. And my own heart, owing to its darkness, deceitfulness, and liability to error, is not a safe witness either. How, then, can I know that I am right with God? There is but one way and that is by the witness of the Holy Spirit. God himself must notify me and make the matter clear. Paul says it this way:

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry “Abba! Father!”

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (Romans 8:15–16)

In other words, unless God himself assures me that I am his child, I will never know for sure. I will continue to live in uncertainty all my days.

But there are also other evidences that will appear when someone is truly saved and adopted into God’s family. These secondary witnesses verify that the primary witness of the Spirit is indeed valid and real.

A *first* evidence comes from my own spirit. It bears witness to the fact that I am indeed a new creation. Deep inside, I know that old things have passed away and all things have become new. My very thoughts and desires have changed. Love, joy, and peace reign within me. My heart no longer condemns me. Pride, selfishness, lust, and anger no longer dominate my thoughts or enslave my will.

A *second* evidence of my new status with God is that my conscience bears witness that I am honest and true in my purposes and intentions; my eye is single to the glory of God and my service to him is now done with simplicity and sincerity.

A *third* evidence comes from the Bible itself; it bears witness that I am born of the Spirit and redeemed. Scripture describes the characteristics of a child of God and because I see these characteristics in my own heart and life, I draw the conclusion that I am saved.

The witness of the Spirit is not likely to be mistaken for something else, just as the sun is not likely to be mistaken for the moon or a glow-worm. But one who has never seen the sun might possibly be confused. So, an unsaved man may mistake some flash of fancy or some pleasant emotion for the witness of the Spirit. But if he is honest, the absence of these three secondary evidences will correct him. It will be obvious to him that as long as sin masters him and he is devoid of the graces and dispositions of God’s people as portrayed in the Bible, he simply cannot with integrity call himself a child of God.

The Holy Spirit cannot witness to what does not exist. He cannot lie. Not until sin is forgiven does he witness to

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have eternal life” (1 Jn 5:13). As a pastor, John carried a burden for those who had *no assurance*, those who lived with constant uncertainty of their identity in Christ. But at the same time, he was also concerned for those who had *false assurance*, those who were deceived about their spiritual status. How could he wake them from their delusional slumber?

In this amazing letter, Pastor John explains what assurance in Christ looks like and what it means to be secure in our salvation. He gives three types of evidence that can help the honest soul to discover his true status with God.

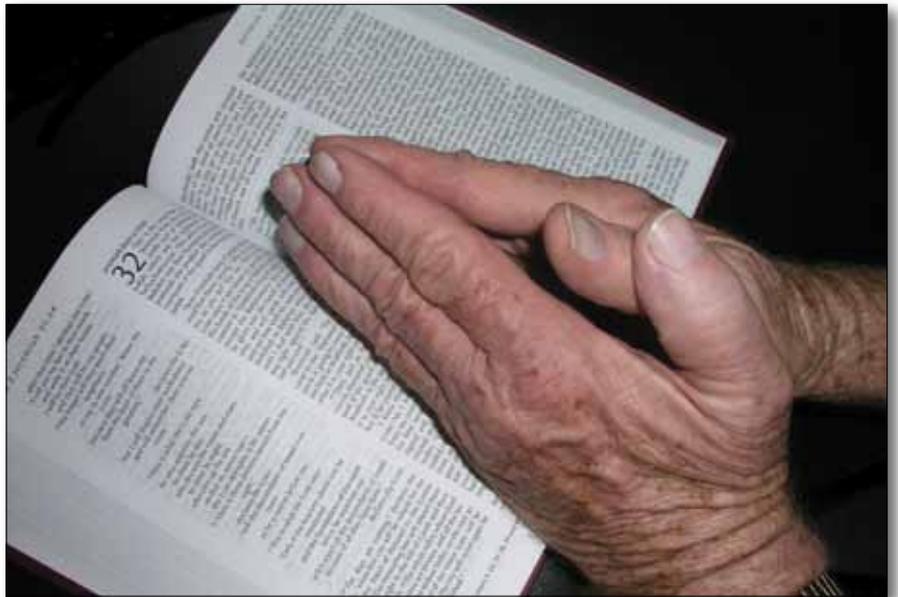
The first type of evidence John brings forth is *the objective witness* of the written Word of God. The first way to know for sure that we are indeed children of God is simply to let God answer the question. If God says you are his child, then it must be true! Our emotions and feelings may lead us astray, but the objective Word of God does not lie. For example, God’s Word says, “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 Jn 5:12). John is stating a straightforward fact. If Jesus is in your heart, then you are his child. God said it, so just believe it! God’s Word also says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...” (1 Jn 1:9). Have you confessed your sins? Then God has promised that they are forgiven. Many of us learned this most basic truth as children when we sang: “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

Pastor John shares a second type of evidence when he speaks of *the practical witness* of our daily lives. No one stated this reality more succinctly than Jesus: “You will recognize them by their fruits” (Mt 7:20). The practical argument is blunt and straightforward: if you see apples hanging from a branch, you know you are dealing with an apple tree. If you see the fruit of the Spirit in someone’s life, then you can be sure you are dealing with a Christian. Conversely, if you see self-centeredness, rebellion, and pride, then you can be sure you are dealing with an unbeliever. Fruit never lies. In this little epistle, John emphasizes two kinds of fruit:

- The fruit of obedience. “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar.... By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 Jn 2:3–6).
- The fruit of love. “Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light” (1 Jn 2:9–10).

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death” (1 Jn 3:14).

The third type of evidence John appeals to is *the subjective witness* of the indwelling Spirit. While the objective witness of the Word and the practical witness of our actions are both outward evidences that we are God’s children, the witness of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul that we are God’s and God is ours. John’s epistle speaks of this inner witness more than once. “And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us” (1 Jn 3:24). “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (1 Jn 4:13). Paul says something similar in Romans 8:16: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” An old gospel hymn makes this truth memorable as we sing: “You ask me how I know he lives, he lives within my heart.”



Like John, the apostle Paul also had a pastoral concern for the persons under his care. He too knew that some of God’s children had no assurance of salvation while others were simply deceived, thinking they were children of God when in reality they were children of the devil. So, he wrote boldly to the church members in Corinth, saying: “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” (II Cor 13:5).

In treating the doctrine of the assurance of the believer, this issue of *The High Calling* hopefully will be a source of great comfort to those who need a divine hug of security from the One who gave his life for us. But for those whose walk simply doesn’t match their talk, we humbly pray that this little magazine may serve as a wake-up call to look in the mirror and “examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith.” ✠

Holding, I Am Held

By Robert Shank
(1918–2006)



Robert Shank was a Southern Baptist minister who became troubled by the way many Calvinist pastors preached eternal security. He wrote *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance* (Springfield: Westcott, 1960) to establish a biblical understanding of the believer's security in Christ.

He argued that a believer's salvation is indeed secure, but it is possible that one may abandon faith and fall from grace. The controversy generated by the book caused Shank to eventually leave the Southern Baptist denomination. The following article is a slightly edited abridgement taken from the chapter entitled, "Kept by the Power of God" (271–83).

“I'd like to be a Christian. But what's the use? I know I couldn't last.” How often do we hear such statements! Many honestly fear that perseverance in the Christian life is beyond their poor powers. And indeed, it is. But there is a sublime truth which many fail to recognize: Christ does not ask us to “go it alone” as his followers. He has promised to be with his own even to the end of the age. Surrounding and sustaining all who follow him in obedient faith is his infinite grace and all the power of Almighty God!

The short epistle of Jude begins and ends on a sublime note of the keeping power of God. He addresses his letter “to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ” (v 1). In his closing doxology, he writes: “Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior” (vv 24–25). But in between the opening assertion and the closing promise are numerous sharp warnings of the peril and

tragedy of apostasy. In his brief summary of this little epistle, Dr. A. T. Pierson writes:

Faith makes faithful saints who are preserved by grace and presented in glory. The contrast is marked between those who did not keep their first estate and fell, and those who keep themselves and are kept from falling. Apostasy is presented in representative examples:

1. *Those who pervert the grace of God into sensuality (v 4).*
2. *Unbelieving Israel in the Exodus (v 5).*
3. *Disobedient angels (v 6).*
4. *Lustful Sodomites (v 7).*
5. *Self-righteous Cain (v 11).*
6. *Greedy Balaam (v 11).*
7. *Presumptuous Korah (v 11).*

If we keep ourselves in the love of God, fighting for the faith, praying in the Holy Spirit and looking for the coming of the Lord, God will keep us.

Jude, who assures us of the keeping grace of God, warns us that there is a corresponding responsibility resting on us. Having cited actual instances of apostasy, Jude turns to address an urgent warning to his readers:

But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves

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Would You Tell Me Again?

By Billy Graham



In his autobiography, *Just As I Am* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), Billy Graham tells of several personal conversations he had with President Dwight Eisenhower about faith and salvation. It seems the president had trouble coming to an assurance that his sins were truly forgiven and that he had indeed the promise of heaven (204–205).

During a visit with Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower at their farm in Gettysburg in 1955, the President took Billy for a long ride in his golf cart, giving him a personal guided tour of the Civil War battlefield. Back in the house, Billy began to discover the real reason he had been invited to the Eisenhower home.

“Billy, do you believe in Heaven?” he asked.

“Yes, sir, I do.”

“Give me your reasons.”

With my New Testament open, I gave the President a guided tour through the Scriptures that spoke of the future life.

“How can a person know he’s going to Heaven?” he asked.

**“Whoever comes to me
I will never cast out.”
(John 6:37)**

I explained the Gospel to him all over again, as I had on previous occasions. I sensed he was reassured by that most misunderstood message: salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone, and not by anything we can do for ourselves. (204)

Not long after this conversation, President Eisenhower suffered a heart attack. Thinking back on their conversation about heaven and assurance, Billy wondered if perhaps the President had somehow anticipated his illness. Years later, in December of 1968, Billy was summoned to Walter Reed Hospital to again visit with Eisenhower. The President was very ill and death was rapidly approaching. Graham notes that the details of the conversation were so intimate and sacred that he only began to share them with others after gaining Mamie’s permission.

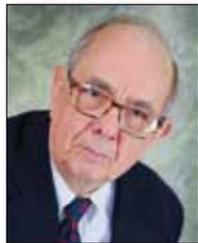
As my scheduled twenty minutes with him extended to thirty, Eisenhower asked the doctor and nurses to leave us. Propped up on pillows amidst intravenous tubes, he took my hand and looked into my eyes. “Billy, you’ve told me how to be sure my sins are forgiven and that I’m going to Heaven. Would you tell me again?”

I took out my New Testament and read to him again the familiar Gospel verses, the precious promises of God about eternal life. Then, my hand still in his, I prayed briefly.

“Thank you,” he said. “I’m ready.” (205) ✦

The Spark that Caused a Revival

By H. Ray Dunning



H. Ray Dunning describes how John Wesley's experience of assurance was the spark that set his heart on fire and helped to ignite the eighteenth century revival. It was when this Anglican priest moved from "I hope so" to "I know so" that the English world felt the impact of the gospel. This article is a slightly edited abridgment taken from *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1988: 441-48).

The doctrine of assurance is one of Wesleyan theology's most distinctive doctrines and at the same time one of its most difficult and controversial ones. H. B. Workman says that it is "the fundamental contribution of Methodism to the life and thought of the Church"; yet it was maligned and criticized, and Wesley spent much of his time defending its validity and explaining its meaning. His preaching of assurance burst upon the English scene as a "new doctrine" that few had ever heard of. In fact, when John first encountered the idea among the Moravians, he had the same reaction. "I was quite amazed," he says, "and looked upon it as a new gospel."

Wesley had to defend this doctrine against two major charges. First, it was believed that such direct operations of the Spirit were limited largely to the apostolic age and were granted to only a few select persons. In other words, assurance was an extraordinary gift. Against this objection, Wesley continuously insisted that it was the privilege of ordinary Christians, available to all.

The second charge was doubtless more serious. He was accused of enthusiasm (fanaticism). To claim a direct and immediate witness of the Spirit could lead to all sorts of excesses and easily become subject to rationalization and self-deception. How Wesley responded to this criticism can perhaps best be seen through a further analysis of his teaching as well as his own personal experience.

It is important to note that the witness of the Spirit is directly related to justification by faith. Wesley's own experience of assurance of salvation occurs on May 24, 1738, with his Aldersgate experience of the "strangely warmed heart." This event took place as a climax of Wesley's encounters over a period of time with Moravians, especially Peter Bohler and

A. G. Spangenberg. It is instructive to compare the conversations with these men and Wesley's own words in describing what happened to him at Aldersgate. The interview with Spangenberg recorded in his *Journal* is clear.

I asked Mr. Spangenberg's advice with regard to myself—to my own conduct. He told me he could say nothing till he had asked me two or three questions. "Do you know yourself? Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?" I was surprised and knew not what to answer. He observed it, and asked: "Do you know Jesus Christ?" I paused and said: "I know he is the Savior of the world." "True," replied he, "but do you know he has saved you?" I answered: "I hope he has died to save me." He only added: "Do you know yourself?" I said:

"I do." But I fear they were vain words.

His descriptive words of Aldersgate reflect the particularity of faith called for in Spangenberg's examination:

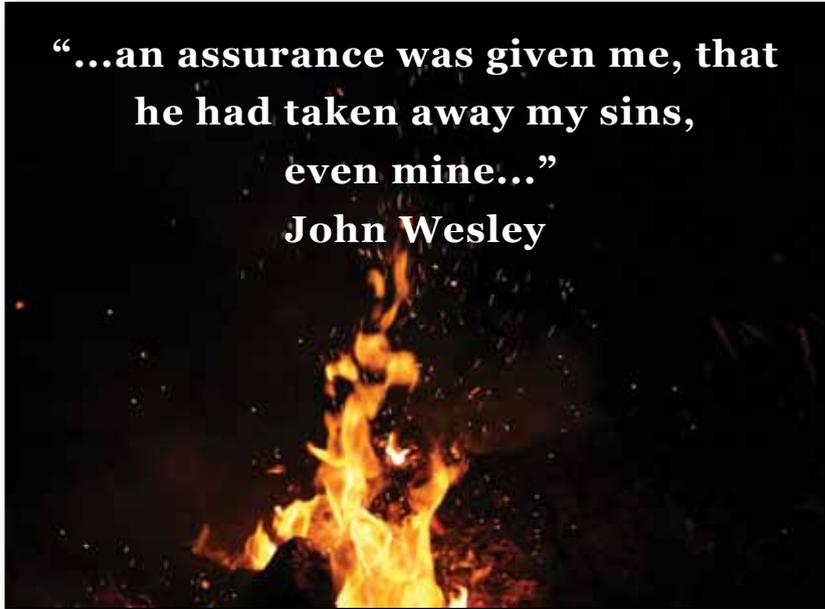
In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine,

while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

This makes it obvious that Wesley moved from a somewhat vague and general faith to a particular, individual appropriating one. Or one could say that it involved a change from an intellectual understanding of faith (assent) to trust.

It is important to note, that for Wesley, the witness of the Spirit is not some general impression from out of the blue that has no grounding in anything objective. Rather, it is

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I Am Who I Once Was Not

By John Bunyan (1628–1688)

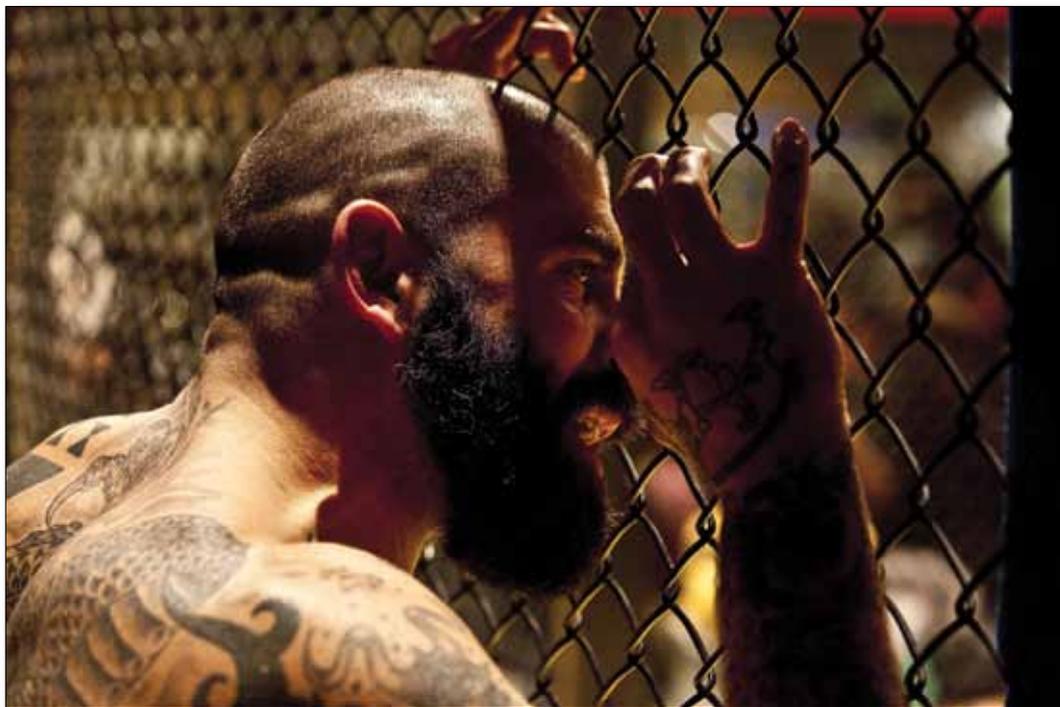


In his classic allegory of the Christian life (*Pilgrim's Progress*, 1678), John Bunyan describes a scene that raises the question: is it possible to fall from grace? Travelling from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, Christian visits the House of the Interpreter. Here he is shown things that will be of help as he continues on his journey. The sixth item shown to him is intended to put the fear of God in his soul. Bunyan, a Baptist pastor, hoped that this picture would help protect his flock from the dangers of back-sliding. Not everyone will agree with Bunyan's treatment of this delicate pastoral issue but you have to respect his courage in tackling a subject of such great importance! This passage is taken from *The Pilgrim's Progress in Modern English* (Alachua: Bridge-Logos, 1998. 40–42).

So Interpreter took Christian by the hand again and led him into a very dark room where a man was sitting in an iron cage. Now the man looked very sad. He sat there with his eyes looking down to the ground and his hands folded together; and he sighed as if his heart would break.

Christian asked, "What does this mean?"

At this, the Interpreter invited him to talk with the man. Then Christian asked the man, "Who are you?" The man answered, "I am who I once was not." "Who were you once?" inquired Christian.



The man said, "In my own eyes and the eyes of others, I was once an honest and flourishing professor of faith. I considered myself once a good candidate for a home in Celestial City, and at that time I even had joy at the thoughts of living there." "Well," said Christian, "who are you now?"

"I'm now a man of despair," answered the man. "I'm shut up in despair just as I am in this Iron Cage. I can't get out—oh, now I cannot!" "But how did you come to be in this condition?" asked Christian.

"I stopped being alert and self-controlled," said the man. "I let loose the reigns of my desires. I sinned against the light of the word and the goodness of God. I've grieved the Spirit, and he is gone. I tempted the devil, and he has come to me. I've provoked God to anger, and he has left me. I have so hardened my heart that I cannot repent."

Then Christian said to the Interpreter, "But is there no hope for such a man as this?" "Ask him," said the Interpreter.

Then Christian asked, "Is there any hope for being kept in the iron cage of despair?" "No, none at all," said the man. "Why?" asked Christian.

"I'm guilty of crucifying him again," answered the man. "I've despised his position, I've hated his righteousness and I've treated his blood as an unholy thing. I've insulted the Spirit of grace. So I've excluded myself from all the promises and now there remains for me nothing but threats, dreadful threats, fearful threats of certain judgment and raging fire, which will devour me as an enemy of God."

"Why did you bring yourself into this condition?" inquired Christian. The man answered, "For the desires, pleasures, and profits of this world. I promised myself great delight in the enjoyment of them. But now every one of those things bite me and gnaw at me like burning worms."

"But can't you repent now and turn?" asked Christian. "God has denied me repentance," said the man. "His word gives me no encouragement to believe. He himself has shut me in this iron cage and all the men in the world

can't let me out. Oh, eternity! Eternity! How will I cope with the misery I'll meet with in eternity?"

Then the Interpreter said to Christian, "Remember this man's misery, and let it be an everlasting caution to you." "Well," said Christian, "this is a fearful thing. May God help me to be alert and self-controlled and to pray so I may avoid the cause of this man's misery." ✠

To accept the possibility of a saint losing salvation would be tantamount to denying the sufficiency of Christ's completed work. Many Scriptures are cited in support of this position: Jn 6:39–40; 10:27–30; Rom 8:29–39; 11:29; Eph 1:4–5; Phil 1:6; 2 Tm 4:8; etc.

Where fellowship with Christ is broken by disobedience, of course, the believer will be chastened by the Holy Spirit, who is grieved when we do not walk in the light. God is always seeking to bring the wayward back to himself. And, thankfully, penitence restores fellowship. But what happens if one does not repent? Can a believer go on and on in deliberate sin, with no sense of remorse or regret, and still regard himself a child of God?

To this question different answers may be given. The most reasonable is that the person was never saved in the first place. Though one may make a profession of faith, the individual is a hypocrite. Genuine Christians

Scripture for this position is also abundant: Ez 32:32; 1 Cor 15:2; Col 1:21–23; Heb 3:6,14; 6:4–6; etc.

A few Arminians believe that the least misstep causes one to lose salvation—any overt sin after conversion results in loss of a saving relationship. This position makes no distinction between sins of consent to evil and denial of Christ. This viewpoint may give strong incentive for diligence in holiness, but it can also make security seem “momentary.”

A much-preferred position, and more generally held, is that deliberate sin breaks fellowship with Christ, but the relationship can be lost only by apostasy. The progression of sin in disobedience is distinguished from the ultimate end of sin, the denial of Christ as Lord and Savior. It is unlikely that a true believer would ever come to this point, but if it does occur, many Arminians hold that there would be no opportunity for restoration.

Defiant disregard of “the blood of the covenant” can lead to that tragic consequence where there “no longer remains a sacrifice for sin, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire (Heb 10:26–27, 29). “If anyone does not abide in me,” Jesus said, “he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (Jn 15:6).

Common Ground

In fairness to both sides of the evangelical spectrum, whether Reformed or Arminian, we can come together around the essential truth of the gospel invitation. Only those persons who respond to the Spirit's call

and come to Christ in true repentance and faith receive the gift of salvation. It is all of God, initiated by divine grace. When believers do not practice their faith through obedience, and become backslidden, they must repent and restore their first love. Those who persevere in faith to the end die in the assurance of salvation. All true believers have eternal life in Christ. Though there will be mishaps along the way, the saints—those who trust themselves to Christ—abide in eternal security.

Let us then appreciate each other. Charles Spurgeon, the beloved preacher of London, put it well:

It seems to me that the path of truth is to believe them both; to hold firmly that salvation is by grace, and to hold with equal firmness that the ruin of

**“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”
(Hebrews 3:12)**



simply do not live habitually in sin. Another view holds that a Christian may completely backslide, yet God will bring the elect back to repentance before death. A more difficult position to maintain within the Reformed tradition allows that a converted person who becomes unfaithful can never fall completely away from grace. The renegade will be sorely chastened by the Spirit and suffer the loss of rewards in heaven but cannot lose salvation.

Conditional Security

Representing a different perspective, the classical Arminian view holds that eternal security is conditional on continuing faith in Christ. Fellowship with Christ is lost through disobedience (inactive faith), but contrary to Calvinism, a saving relationship can be lost, but only by unconfessed sin, culminating in apostasy. Support in

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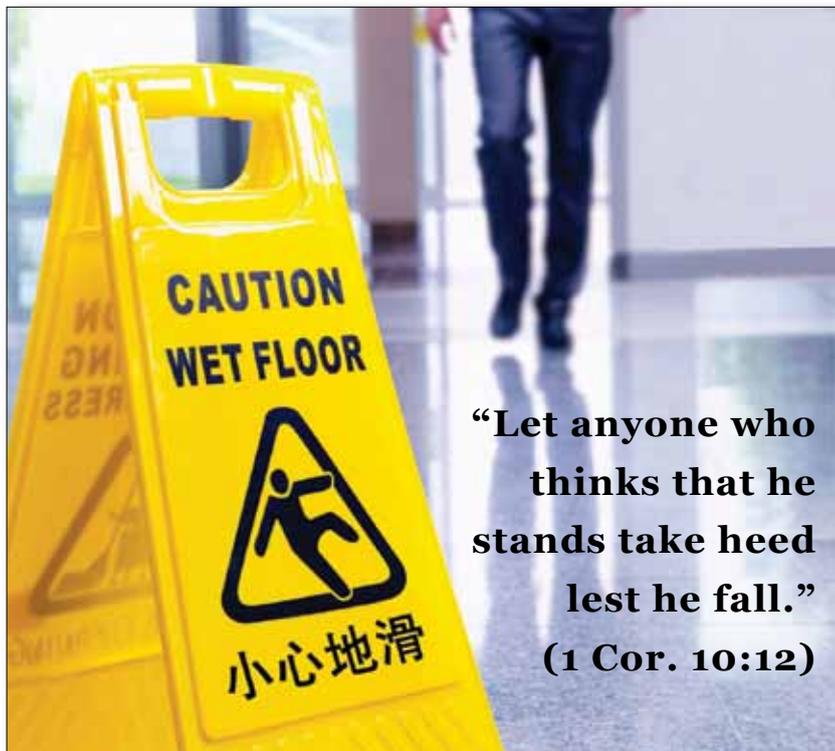
in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. (vv 20–21)

While the keeping grace of God is a precious fact, the Scriptures reveal there is a prerequisite “keeping” which is the responsibility of man. Both are in view in Jesus’ exhortation to “remain in me and I in you” (Jn 15:4). In fact, there are many places in the Scriptures where God’s keeping and man’s keeping are closely associated. Consider the following:

- Jesus says to the church at Philadelphia: “Because you have *kept* my word... I will *keep* you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world...” (Rv 3:10).
- John asserts that God is able to *keep* and protect those who have been born of God and then a few short verses later exhorts these same believers: “*keep* yourselves from idols” (1 Jn 5:18, 21).
- Though there is certainly nothing ineffectual about the keeping grace of God, Jesus was fully aware of the possibility of failure: “While I was with them, I *kept* them in your name... I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction [Judas]...” (Jn 17:11–12, 15).
- The writer of the book of Hebrews reminds us that God will never leave us or forsake us (Heb 13:5). But only a few verses before this he had warned: “See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven” (Heb 12:25).
- Peter declares that it is “through faith” that we are “*kept* by God’s power for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Then he immediately commands us to stand firm in our present trials (1 Pt 1:5–9).

The peril is never that the Lord may forsake his people, but rather that his people may forsake him. The necessity of keeping ourselves in the saving grace of Christ is quite as much a doctrine of the Holy Scriptures as the power and faithfulness of Christ to save and keep all who trust in him. Those who keep faith are kept by the power of God.

It is true that eternal life is the free gift of God to undeserving sinners. But just as the acceptance of the gift is costly, so is the retention of that gift, once received. “Be faithful unto



**“Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”
(1 Cor. 10:12)**

death, and I will give you the crown of life... The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death” (Rv 2:10–11). Conquer we must, if we are to reign eternally with Christ. “If we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us” (2 Tm 2:12).

Sometime ago, a young father shared the burdens of his heart with me as we talked together in the quiet of my study. He had known recent bereavement, and was passing through deep waters of ill health, loss of income, and mounting expense. Never shall I forget his words. After a moment’s quiet, he looked up and calmly said, “But those nail-pierced hands are mine. They’re holding me fast.”

Above the doorway of his Pastor’s College in London, Spurgeon affixed the words, “Holding, I am held.” A precious truth! But neither the first clause, nor the latter, can stand alone. They are complementary. Together, they comprehend the meaning of our Savior’s words, “Remain in me, and I in you.” ✨

March 2 - 4, 2018
Friday evening through
Sunday noon

Epworth by the Sea
100 Arthur J. Moore Dr.
St. Simons Island, GA 31522

For Men & Women

Prayer Facilitators:
Dan & Katy Beth Searls
Dr. Allan Coppedge

“Call to Me”
Prayer Retreat

Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know. (Jeremiah 33:3)

HOLY HEART 2018 EVENT
INDIAN SPRINGS LADIES FELLOWSHIP
Titus Women

that fact. Not until we are born again does he witness that we are children of God. Charles Wesley encourages us to sing about this glorious reality:

*How can a sinner know
His sins on earth forgiven?
How can my gracious Savior show
My name inscribed in heaven?
We who in Christ believe
That he for us has died,
We all his unknown peace receive,
And feel his blood applied.*

There are a number of important truths to keep in mind in this matter:

1. The witness of the Spirit is dependent upon our faith. God does not give it to those who do not believe in Jesus. If our faith wavers, the witness will become intermittent. If our faith fails, it will be withdrawn. Steadfast faith will keep the inner witness bright.
2. We must not take our attention off Jesus and fix it on our inward feelings of assurance. The witness of the Spirit continues only while we look to Jesus and trust and obey him. When we take our eyes off him, the witness is gone.
3. The witness may grow stronger and brighter as we trust and obey. It may grow weaker and dimmer if we neglect our duty by laziness in prayer, failure to spend time in the Word, and carelessness in our walk.
4. There seem to be some forms of nervous disorders and disease that, for a time, may cloud the mind and interfere with a clear discernment of the witness of the Spirit. And there may be seasons of fierce temptation and spiritual attack which make it difficult to rest quietly in the assurance of God's love and acceptance. In such moments, we must rest on the promise that he will never leave us or forsake us. Blessed be God!
5. The witness will be lost if we willfully sin or persistently disobey a clear command. This witness is a pearl of great price and Satan will try his best to steal it from us. Therefore, we must guard it with watchful prayer continually.
6. If the witness is lost, it may be found again by prayer, faith, and obedience. Thousands who have lost the witness have found it again, and often they have found it with increased brightness and glory.

Dear brother and sister, if you don't have this inner witness of God's Spirit, seek it now by faith in Jesus. Go to him now and do not let him go until he notifies you that you are his! And if you once knew the witness but now have lost it, look up in faith to your loving heavenly Father and he will restore it to you. You need no longer doubt. You can know that you are his. Hallelujah! ✨



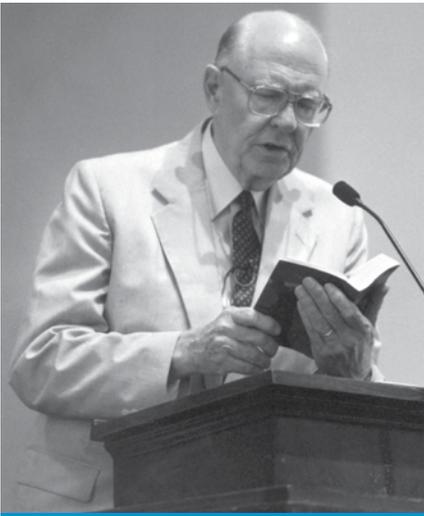
A Hymn for Backsliders

John and Charles Wesley were not only evangelists and theologians; they were pastors. They were deeply concerned about the spiritual well-being of the flock under their care. Charles Wesley (1707–1788) wrote “Depth of Mercy” specifically for “mourners convinced of backsliding.” Can you imagine a church service today where the worship leader invited all backsliders to stand and sing? Though the Wesley brothers passionately preached the blessed assurance of sins forgiven, they recognized that falling from grace remained a real possibility throughout this life.

*Depth of mercy! Can there be
Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God his wrath forbear?
Me, the chief of sinners, spare?
I have long withstood his grace,
Long provoked him to his face,
Would not hearken to his calls,
Grieved him by a thousand falls.*

*I my Master have denied,
I afresh have crucified,
Oft profaned his hallowed name,
Put him to an open shame.
If I rightly read Thy heart,
If Thou all compassion art,
Bow Thine ear, in mercy bow,
Pardon and accept me now.*

*Now incline me to repent,
Let me now my sins lament,
Now my foul revolt deplore,
Weep, believe, and sin no more.
There for me the Savior stands,
Shows his wounds and spreads his hands.
God is love! I know, I feel;
Jesus weeps and loves me still.*



THE *Kinlaw*
Legacy FUND

Remembering Eight Decades of Ministry

By Charlie Fiskeaux

For approximately eight decades after his experience at Indian Springs Camp Meeting as a teenager, Dr. Dennis Kinlaw proclaimed the message of the undivided heart—wholly devoted to God. Over the years, he impacted many persons as an evangelist, teacher, ministry leader, administrator, visionary, and personal friend. But his voice is now stilled, since he has entered into the presence of the Lord that he served so faithfully over his years of ministry.

However, Dr. Kinlaw has bequeathed to us at the Francis Asbury Society the vital ministry of continuing to proclaim the message of the undivided heart. Among the varied ministries of the Society, we endeavor to support a number of speaker-evangelists who continue to proclaim this message in many venues literally around the world. Your contribution to the Kinlaw Legacy Fund enables our speaker-evangelists to “go into all the world,” faithfully proclaiming the message of full salvation.

Gifts of all types are appreciated, including present gifts of cash, investments, or tangible assets and deferred gifts through one’s estate or will. Persons interested in making non-cash or deferred gifts should contact President Stan Key. ✦

The Spark that Caused a Revival *continued from page 6*

directly related to the implicit promise of God observed in Jesus Christ that God loves me and sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for my sins. Actually, the witness is as much, or more, an assurance of God’s love for me as of my subjective state. Wesley persistently argues that assurance is more than a psychological release; it is the supernatural interaction of the divine Spirit with the human spirit, an activity that defies explanation.

In response to the charge of enthusiasm, Wesley insisted that the genuine witness could be tested by several criteria: It must be preceded by repentance, which in turn must be followed by a “vast and mighty ethical change.” The scriptural marks of joy, love, and obedience to the law of God must follow. These may be present and the witness absent, but if these are absent, the witness cannot be present.

One important distinction Wesley made was between the “assurance of salvation” and the “assurance of faith.” In a letter to Arthur Bedford on August 4, 1738, Wesley says: “That assurance of which alone I speak, I should not choose to call an assurance of salvation, but rather (with the Scriptures) the assurance of faith.... I think the scriptural words are always best.” This is far more than a semantic squabble. Both Bedford and Wesley understood that the term “assurance of salvation” meant a knowledge that we would *persevere* in a state of salvation, whereas Wesley was only willing to claim that we had the witness of the Spirit that we are *now* in a state of salvation.

John Calvin maintained the position that the Christian could be certain not only of his present salvation but also of his perseverance in the faith to the very end. This is,

of course, a corollary to the belief in eternal security. As a contemporary Calvinist put it, “This is not to deny that through stubbornness and presumption they may fall time and again, but they will never fall out of the sphere of grace.”

Wesley never ceased to hold the witness of the Spirit was an experience for which all Christians should seek. He wrote in 1768, “A consciousness of being in favor with God... is the common privilege of Christians fearing God and working righteousness.” ✦

Slack Abiding *continued from page 8*

any man is wholly and entirely his own fault; to maintain the sovereignty of God, and to hold the responsibility of man also; to believe in the free agency of both God and man; neither to dishonor God by making him a lackey to his creature’s will, nor on the other hand, to rid man of all responsibility by making him to be a mere log or a machine.

Spurgeon’s counsel was to let the Bible speak for itself. Then as a parting word, he added:

I trust you never desire that any text might be amended so as to read a little more Calvinist or a little more like the teaching of Arminius. Always stand to it that your creed must bend to the Bible, and not the Bible to your creed, and dare to be a little inconsistent with yourselves, if need be, sooner than be inconsistent with God’s revealed truth. ✦

The Francis Asbury Society Covenant Fellowship

By Mike Powers, Director of Discipleship



Throughout the history of the church, men and women have joined together in various types of societies, bands, and associations so they could more faithfully follow Jesus Christ. Examples of such fellowships can be found in the Bible (the Levites, the Rechabites, the school of the prophets, the Twelve, Paul's missionary teams, etc.) and in church history (the Franciscans, the Jesuits, the Methodist societies, missionary organizations, ministries, etc.). Today as well, many are looking for deeper experiences with Jesus and more authentic expressions of Christian community where they can live out the fuller dimensions of the gospel.

The purpose of the Francis Asbury Society Covenant Fellowship is to provide and promote an identifiable community of men and women who are committed to holiness of heart and life, edifying relationships, and revival in the church and the nation. The Covenant Fellowship is a definitive part of the Francis Asbury Society; in fact, it is the Society.

As we begin a new year, look for more information about the Covenant Fellowship in the next few weeks and

months. You will be encouraged to join this Fellowship of mutual encouragement, prayer, and inspiration to live lives wholly devoted to God. Membership is purely voluntary, and those who join may cease their involvement whenever they so choose. ✠



The High Calling—January–February 2018

The High Calling is a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society to serve as a link between FAS and its constituents, building loyalty and awareness so that the teaching and experience of Christian holiness may continue to be lived and proclaimed throughout the world.

The Francis Asbury Society

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Sign up to receive our companion e-newsletter, *Ministry Matters*, at www.francisasburysociety.com

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- Slack Abiding (Coleman)
- The Witness of the Spirit (Brengle)
- Holding, I Am Held (Shank)
- Would You Tell Me Again? (Graham)
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- I Am Who I Once Was Not (Bunyan)
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In this Issue:

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The High Calling

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