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### Am I Saved? Should I Say So? (Part I)

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# Memory, Meaning & Faith

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July 16, 2010

## Am I Saved? Should I Say So? (Part I)

by Jerry Moon



According to one survey, less than 70% of Adventists worldwide have confident assurance of present salvation (“Three Strategic Issues: A World Survey,” Institute of World Mission, Andrews University, 2002; cited by Nathan Brown, *Adventist Review*, June 19, 2003, 27). Ellen White herself said, “this I do know, that our churches are dying for the want of teaching on the subject of righteousness by faith in Christ” ([1888 Materials](#), 547).

Some hold that Ellen White is primarily to blame for Adventists’ lack of assurance. I know from personal experience as a pastor and teacher that many Adventists do not believe that Ellen White teaches present assurance. The following study presents the results of my search for and finding of a genuine assurance of salvation that I believe fully accords with the totality of the evidence in both the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White.

### Essential Elements Of Assurance

Assurance of salvation is the inward witness of the Holy Spirit ([Rom 8:16](#); [Gal 4:6](#)) that one has present salvation in Christ. Ellen White held that while it is possible to have either salvation without assurance (DA 638, cf. [Rom 2:11-16](#)) or false assurance without salvation (1T 133-134, 158, 163, 242-243), genuine biblical assurance of salvation is essential to the normal Christian life (1T 242-243; 1SM 373). Her teaching on assurance is based on Scriptures too numerous to list here, but among them are [John 3:16](#); [John 6:37](#); [1 John 1:9](#); [2:1](#); [5:11](#) (4MR 356); [Luke 15:20](#); [1 Tim 1:15](#); [2:4](#); [Isa 1:18-20](#); [55:6-7](#); [64:6](#); [Jer 31:3](#); and [Ezek 36:26-27](#). She read these texts not from a [predestinarian](#) perspective, but from an [Arminian](#) conviction that salvation and assurance are grounded in God’s unwavering purpose and persistent initiative (DA 175; 5T 632) to save all who will accept the salvation provided through the life, death, resurrection, and high-priestly intercession of Jesus Christ (SC 26-27, 68).

Ellen White’s concept of assurance includes three essential elements:

1. “Justification through faith in the atoning blood of Christ, and
2. The renewing power of the Holy Spirit upon the heart,
3. Bringing forth fruit in a life conformed to the example of Christ” (GC 256).

Most of the misconceptions about her view of assurance arise from misunderstandings of these three elements and their relations to each other.

### The Ground Of Justification

First, she insisted that the “root” and “ground” of justification is always and only the work of Christ, received by faith (GC

256). (In justification she included both forgiveness and change of heart [MB 114, SC 49]. But change of outward behavior she classed as a “fruit” of justification [GC 256]). “The blessings of the new covenant are grounded purely on mercy in forgiving unrighteousness and sins,” and “all who humble their hearts, confessing their sins, will find mercy and grace and assurance” (Lt 276, 1904, in 7BC 931).

She declares emphatically that those who come to Jesus must

believe that He saves them *solely through His grace*. . . . Through faith we receive the grace of God; but *faith is not our Saviour. It earns nothing*. It is the hand by which we lay hold upon Christ, and appropriate His merits, the remedy for sin. And *we cannot even repent without the aid of the Spirit of God*. [Acts 5:31 quoted]. Repentance comes from Christ as truly as does pardon. (DA 175, emphasis supplied)

### **New Life Through The Spirit**

The second essential in her view of assurance is that when Christ is received by faith, “the Spirit of God . . . produces a new life in the soul” (DA 176). Her insistence on the absolute necessity of this ongoing “life in the soul” constitutes the major distinction between her understanding of assurance and the popular conception that a one-time act of believing is enough to insure eternal security.

We must not base our salvation upon supposition; we must know of a surety that Christ is formed within, the hope of glory. We must know for ourselves that the Spirit of God is abiding in our hearts, and that we can hold communion with God. Then if He should come to us quickly, if by any chance our life should suddenly be ended, we should be ready to meet our God. (Ms 21, 1903, in 6MR 32)

“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*.” As the “flower of the field must have its root in the soil; it must have air, dew, showers, and sunshine,” so the believer must “receive from God that which ministers to the life of the soul” (TM 367, emphasis supplied).

This ongoing “life of the soul” is the difference between those who merely profess faith in Christ and those who truly know Him and walk by faith in Him. It is both the believer’s highest privilege (MH 99; 6MR 31; RH April 15, 1884) and the most basic essential. “We may have the assurance today that Jesus lives, and is making intercession for us. We cannot do good to those around us while our own souls are destitute of spiritual life” (RH April 22, 1884).

### **Obedience And Service**

Third, because “those who are in connection with God are channels for the power of the Holy Spirit,” the “inner life of the soul will reveal itself in the outward conduct” (HP 22). The human response of grateful love to God, bearing fruit in obedience and service, is in no sense the root or ground of salvation, but it does constitute visible evidence that there is life in the soul. “As the mother watches for the smile of recognition from her little child, which tells of the dawning of intelligence, so does Christ watch for the expression of grateful love, which shows that spiritual life is begun in the soul” (DA 191). “If Christ is dwelling in the heart, it is impossible to conceal His presence” (MB 41).

This impossibility of concealing the divine life in the soul is the consideration that explains Ellen White’s frequent emphasis on the external evidences of salvation. She regards the lack of visible change in the life of a professed Christian as clear evidence that there is no divine life within, hence that the new birth has not yet occurred. If the new birth has not yet occurred, the person does not have salvation, and any claim to assurance would be self-deception.

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

### **Security And Free Will**

Ellen White's concept of security is expressed in an Arminian framework that recognizes that believers retain forever the

freedom to turn away from God, hence the privilege and necessity of a daily renewal of conversion (MB 150). But for those who yield to the Lordship of Christ through the Holy Spirit, daily seeking a deeper experience in His love and a more complete surrender to His will, there is abundant and solid security. It is not the security of an irreversible guarantee, but the security of serving a God whose persistence in seeking the sinner goes far beyond the weakness of the believer's faith. The one who keeps on coming to Him will *never* be cast out (John 6:37).

Thus she writes,

All who have put on the robe of Christ's righteousness will stand before Him as chosen and faithful and true. Satan has no power to pluck them out of the hand of the Saviour. Not one soul who in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power". (PK 587; cf. MB 71)

### Words Of Comfort

One of White's favorite texts on security was 1 John 2:1. To a woman in need of assurance, White reported hearing this text in vision, quoted by an angel. "Said the angel, 'God leaves not His people, even if they err. He turns not from them in wrath for any light thing. If they sin they have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.'"

She continued, "He who so loved you as to give His own life for you will not turn you off and forsake you unless you willfully, determinedly forsake Him to serve the world and Satan" (Lt 17, 1862 to \*Susan G. Russell, excerpted in HP 119). (To read more about this letter [click here](#).) Again she wrote, "if any man sin, he is not to give himself up to despair, and talk like a man who is lost to Christ. 'If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous'" (ST Jan. 3, 1895).

Confronting some ministers, delegates to the 1883 General Conference Session, who were anxious and worried, "talking fears and doubts" as to whether they would be saved, she challenged, "Brethren, you have expressed many doubts; but have you followed your Guide? You must dispense with him before you can lose your way; for the Lord has hedged you in on every side" (RH April 15, 1884).

Climaxing one of her most powerful appeals to trust in Christ, she declared,

Faith comes by the word of God. Then grasp His promise, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37. Cast yourself at His feet with the cry, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." *You can never perish while you do this—never.* (DA 429, emphasis supplied)

To a mature Christian who, because of depression due to illness, found it hard to believe, Ellen White wrote,

The message from God to me for you is "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). If you have nothing else to plead before God but this one promise from your Lord and Saviour, you have the assurance that you will never, never be turned away. It may seem to you that you are hanging upon a single promise, but appropriate that one promise, and it will open to you the whole treasure house of the riches of the grace of Christ. Cling to that promise and you are safe. "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Present this assurance to Jesus, and *you are as safe as though inside the city of God.* (10MR 175, emphasis supplied)

Despite the possibility of backsliding, Ellen White believed in present assurance and security. "If you are right with God today, you are ready if Christ should come today" (HP 227).

[Click here to read Part II.](#)




[Jerry Moon](#) is chair of the Church History Department in the Seminary at Andrews University; co-editor of a theological journal, Andrews University Seminary Studies; and head elder of the St. Joseph, Michigan, Seventh-day Adventist Church. Jerry and wife Sue (Staples) graduated from Union College (1971-72) and spent 11 years in pastoral and evangelistic ministry. Jerry is co-editor of The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia, forthcoming from Review and Herald. He enjoys reading, writing, and a variety of outdoor activities.

Posted by David Hamstra on July 16, 2010 in [Adventist Studies](#) | [Permalink](#)

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Thank you, Jerry, for this refreshing recounting and overview of the teaching of the assurance of salvation in the writings of Ellen White. Too often we overlook the historical context of her statements, and forget that she is often arguing against a "once-saved, always saved mentality," and not opposing the present assurance of a saving relationship with Christ. At times she objected to confident assertions of "I am saved," but in the context of people making ultimate claims about their final destiny. We cannot know what choices we may make tomorrow or next year. But as we abide in Christ's promises today, we can have that assurance of salvation in the present.

Posted by: [Nicholas Miller](#) | [July 16, 2010 at 04:33 PM](#)

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