

# **The FACTS of Salvation:**

## **A Summary of Arminian Theology/the Biblical Doctrines of Grace**

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The distinctive tenets of Arminian theology may be presented using the acronym FACTS. The opposing theology of Calvinism is well known for its acronym TULIP (for a description of TULIP, see <http://evangelicalarminians.org/an-outline-of-the-facts-of-arminianism-vs-the-tulip-of-calvinism/#calvinism>). But Arminians prefer to deal with the facts rather than play with flowers. And here they are, presented by logical order rather than acronym order to facilitate explanation most helpfully:

(Please note: all Scripture citations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted. Article numbers from “The Five Articles of the Remonstrance” (for the full articles, see <http://evangelicalarminians.org/the-five-articles-of-remonstrance/>) have been placed in brackets next to the corresponding points of FACTS for comparison to the first historic statement of Arminian theology. You can view an outline of FACTS <http://evangelicalarminians.org/anoutline-of-the-facts-of-arminianism-vs-the-tulip-of-calvinism/>.)

### **Total Depravity (the T in FACTS) [Cf. Article 3 of the 5 Articles of the Remonstrance]**

Humanity was created in the image of God, good and upright, but fell from its original sinless state through willful disobedience, leaving humanity in the state of total depravity, sinful, separated from God, and under the sentence of divine condemnation (Rom 3:23; 6:23; Eph 2:1-3). Total depravity does not mean that human beings are as bad as they could be, but that sin impacts every part of a person’s being and that people now have a sinful nature with a natural inclination toward sin. Human beings are fundamentally corrupt at heart. As Scripture tells us, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick” (Jer 17:9; cf. Gen 6:5; Matt 19:17; Luke 11:13). Indeed, human beings are spiritually dead in sins (Eph 2:1-3; Col 2:13) and are slaves to sin (Rom 6:17-20). The Apostle Paul even says, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom 7:18). Elsewhere he testifies, “as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one’ ” (Rom 3:10-12; cf. Rom 1:18-32; Eph 4:17-22). In their natural state, human beings are hostile toward God and cannot submit to his Law nor please him (Rom 8:7-8). Thus, human beings are not able to think, will, nor do anything good in and of themselves. We are unable do anything that merits favor from God and we cannot do anything to save ourselves from the judgment and condemnation of God that we deserve for our sin. We cannot even believe the gospel on our own (John 6:44). If anyone is to be saved, God must take the initiative.

### **Atonement for All (the A in FACTS) [Cf. Article 2 of the 5 Articles of the Remonstrance]**

As observed above, due to total depravity, no one can be saved unless God takes the initiative. The good news is that, since “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16), “his mercy is over all that he has made” (Ps. 135:14), he loves even his enemies (Matt 5:38-43), he “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4), “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9), and he does not take any pleasure in the death of the wicked, but would rather that they repent of their sins and live (Ezek. 18:23, 33), he *has* taken the initiative by sending his only Son to die for the sins of the world. As John 3:16-18 so

beautifully tell us: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” God has provided for the forgiveness of sins and salvation of every person by the death of Jesus Christ on behalf of sinful humanity. Indeed, by the grace of God Jesus tasted death for everyone (Heb 2:9). As 1 John 2:2 says, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (NIV). After the statement of 1 Tim 2:4 quoted above that “God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,” the following verses from 1 Timothy continue, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time (1 Tim 2:5-6). Indeed, “the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10), “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:9), “the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14; cf. John 4:42), God is “the Savior of all people” (1 Tim 4:10), Jesus is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), who “died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6), and “died for all” (2 Cor 5:14-15) when “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor 5:19). Jesus even died for those who reject him and his word, deny him, and perish (Luke 22:17-21; John 12:46-48; Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11; 2 Pet 2:1; Heb 10:29). The provision of atonement has been made for as many as sin, which is all people (Rom 3:22-25; 5:18).

But even though Jesus died for all and has provided atonement for all, the intent of the atonement provided was that its actual application (which grants the forgiveness of sins, righteous status with God, and salvation) be conditional on faith in Jesus Christ. This is stated rather clearly in John 3:16-18 quoted above. Out of love, God sacrificed his only Son for the world so that those from the world who trust in Jesus and his atoning sacrifice will benefit from that atoning sacrifice and be saved while those from the world who reject that atoning sacrifice in unbelief will not benefit from it but remain condemned and perish (cf. various other passages that make it clear that faith is the condition upon which and the means by which forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation are received, for example: Luke 8:12; John 1:12; 3:36; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Rom 1:16; chs. 3-4; 10:9-10; 1 Cor 1:21; Gal 2:16; ch. 3; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 1:16). Since the atonement was provided for all, making salvation available to all, Scripture sometimes portrays justification as potential for all people (Rom 3:22-25; 5:18) even though not all will ultimately be saved. Although God desires that all believe and be saved through Christ's blood, many will perish, not for lack of the availability of salvation, but because they reject the saving provision made for them in Christ's death and have “not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18). Similarly, Scripture's references to God or Christ as the Savior of the world/all (John 4:42; 1 Tim 4:10; 1 John 4:14) do not mean that all will actually be saved, but that the Father and the Son have provided salvation for all that is effective only for those who believe. As 1 Tim 4:10 itself says, “we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.” And Titus 2:11 can give encouragement to believers to present a good witness for Christ to the unbelieving world with this reason: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” Indeed, it is Christ's unlimited atonement that serves as the necessary foundation of the genuine offer of salvation held out to all in the gospel and is in accord with the command to preach the gospel to all. For example, speaking to a

general Jewish audience, the Apostle Peter based a call to repentance on the work of Christ and implied that work was for everyone in his audience when he assured them that God sent Christ to turn each of them from their sin:

<sup>18</sup> But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. <sup>19</sup> Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, <sup>20</sup> that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, <sup>21</sup> whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. . . <sup>26</sup> God, having raised up his servant, sent him [Christ] to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness. (Act 3:18-21, 26)

As Luke 24:45-47 reports, “Then he [Christ] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them [his apostles], ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem’” (cf. Matt 28:18-20; Acts 17:30).

**Freed to Believe by God's Grace (the F in FACTS)** [Cf. Articles 3-4 of the 5 Articles of the Remonstrance]

As we have noted, because human beings are fallen and sinful, they are not able to think, will, nor do anything good in and of themselves, *including believe the gospel of Christ* (see the description of Total Depravity above). Therefore, desiring the salvation of all and having provided atonement for all people (see “Atonement for All” above), God continues to take the initiative for the purpose of bringing all people to salvation by calling all people everywhere to repent and believe the gospel (Acts 17:30; cf. Matt 28:18-20), and by enabling those who hear the gospel to respond to it positively in faith. Unaided by grace, man cannot even choose to please God or to believe the promise of salvation held out in the gospel. As Jesus said in John 6:44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” But thanks be to God, Jesus also promised, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). Thus, the Father and the Son draw all people to Jesus, enabling them to come to Jesus in faith. Even though sinful people are blind to the truth of the gospel (2 Cor 4:4), Jesus came into the world of sinful humanity as “the true light, which enlightens everyone” (John 1:9; cf. 12:36), the light about which John the Baptist came to bear witness, “that all might believe through him” (John 1:7). So we find Jesus speaking to people who were unwilling to believe in him so that they could be saved (John 5:34, 40) and urging unbelievers, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (John 12:35-36). Indeed, God shone in the hearts of his apostles “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6), and the Apostle Paul was given grace “to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things” (Eph 3:8-9). This refers to the gospel of God’s grace, which “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16), and actually makes it possible, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for those who hear to believe, for

“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); [note that Paul is applying Deut. 30:12, which indicates ability to obey God’s word, to the gospel message, indicating that those who hear the gospel are given the ability to believe it!] because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 10:8-13).

Moreover, “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17), though it does not cause faith necessarily, since “they have not all obeyed the gospel” (Rom 10:16) even though they heard it (Rom 10:18). God offers his amazing saving grace in his Son to sinners, but allows them to choose whether they will accept it or reject it. Hence, in the case of Israel, the God who loves all and works for the salvation of all says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people” (Rom 10:21).

Continuing Jesus’ mission to save the world, the Holy Spirit has come to “convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). Even though unbelievers “are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart” (Eph 4:18), the Lord opens people’s hearts to respond positively to the gospel message (Acts 16:14) and his kindness leads those with hard and impenitent hearts toward repentance (Rom 2:4-5). In his sovereignty, he has even positioned people for the very purpose “that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27; NASB). In sum, God calls all people everywhere to repent and believe the gospel, enabling those who hear the gospel to respond to it positively in faith as he draws all people toward faith in Jesus, pierces the darkness of their hearts and minds with the shining of his light, enlightens their minds, communicates his awesome power with the gospel that incites faith, woos them with his kindness, convicts them by his Spirit, opens their hearts to heed his gospel, and positions them to seek him as he is near to each one.

All of this is what is known in traditional theological language as God’s prevenient grace. The term “prevenient” simply means “preceding.” Thus, “prevenient grace” refers to God’s grace that precedes salvation, including that part of salvation known as regeneration, which is the beginning of eternal spiritual life granted to all who trust in Christ (John 1:12-13). Prevenient grace is also sometimes called enabling grace or pre-regenerating grace. This is God’s unmerited favor toward totally depraved people, who are unworthy of God’s blessing and unable to seek God or trust in him in and of themselves. Accordingly, Acts 18:27 indicates that we believe through grace, placing grace preveniently (i.e. logically prior) to faith as the means by which we believe. It is the grace that, among other things, frees our wills to believe in Christ and his gospel. As Titus 2:11 says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.”

We speak of the will of man being freed by grace to emphasize that people do not have a naturally free will when it comes to believing in Jesus, but that God must graciously take action to free our wills if we are going to be able to believe in his Son whom he sent for the salvation of all. When our wills are freed, we can either accept God's saving grace in faith or reject it to our own ruin. In other words, God's saving grace is resistible, which is to say that he dispenses his calling, drawing, and convicting grace (which would bring us to salvation if responded to with faith) in such a way that we may reject it. We become free to believe in Jesus and free to reject him. The resistibility of God's saving grace is clearly shown in Scripture, as some of the passages already mentioned testify. Indeed, the Bible is sadly filled with examples of people spurning the grace of God offered to them. In Isaiah 5:1-7, God actually indicates that he could not have done anything more to get Israel to produce good fruit. But if irresistible grace is something that God dispenses, then he could have easily provided that and infallibly brought Israel to bear good fruit. Many passages in the Old Testament talk about how God extended his grace to Israel over and over again but they repeatedly resisted and rejected him (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:7-23; Jer 25:3-11; 26:1-9; 35:1-19). 2 Chronicles 36:15-16 mentions that God's persistent reaching out to his people, which was rejected, was motivated by compassion for them. But this could only be if the grace he extended them enabled them to repent and avoid his judgment yet was resistible since they did indeed resist it and suffered God's judgment. Nehemiah 9 presents a striking example of Old Testament testimony to God continually reaching out to Israel with his grace that was met with resistance and rejection. We do not have space to review the entire passage (but the reader is encouraged to do so), but will quote some key elements and draw attention to some important points. Nehemiah 9:20a says, "You [God] gave your good Spirit to instruct them [Israel]" and is followed by an extensive catalogue of gracious divine actions toward Israel in vv. 9:20b-25. Then 9:26-31 says,

<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. <sup>27</sup> Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. <sup>28</sup> But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies. <sup>29</sup> And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. <sup>30</sup> Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. <sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

The text affirms that God gave his Spirit to instruct Israel (9:20a) and that God sent his prophets and warned Israel for the purpose of turning them back to him. God purposed his actions to turn

Israel back to him/his Law, yet they rebelled. This shows God allowing his purpose to not come to pass because of allowing human beings a choice of whether to yield to his grace or not. Intriguingly, the word translated “bore” in Neh 9:30 uses a Hebrew word that usually means something like “draw, drag, pull” and gets translated in the Greek translation of the Old Testament used by the early church with the same word used in John 6:44a (“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him”). A better translation of Neh 9:30 would be, “Many years you drew them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear.” The text speaks of a resistible divine drawing that seeks to bring people to the Lord in repentance. Stephen also furnished a good example of the resistibility of grace when he said to his fellow Jews, “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it” (Acts 7:51-53). Luke 7:30 tells us that “the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves.” And Jesus, who spoke to people for the purpose of saving them (John 5:34), yet found that they refused to come to him to have life (John 5:40), and who came to turn every Jew from their sin (Acts 3:26; see the treatment of this text under “Atonement for All” above), yet clearly found that not every Jew believed in him, lamented over his people’s unwillingness to receive his grace, saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” (Luke 13:34; see further Ezek 24:13; Matt 23:37; Rom 2:4-5; Zech 7:11-14; Heb 10:29; 12:15; Jude 4; 2 Cor 6:1-2; Ps 78:40-42).

Arminians differ among themselves about some of the details of how God’s prevenient grace works, probably because Scripture itself does not give a detailed description. Some Arminians believe that God continually enables all people to believe at all times as a benefit of the atonement. Others believe that God only bestows the ability to believe in Christ to people at select times according to his good pleasure and wisdom. Still others believe that prevenient grace generally accompanies any of God’s specific movements toward people, rendering them able to respond positively to such movements as God would have them. But all Arminians agree that people are incapable of believing in Jesus apart from the intervention of God’s grace and that God does bestow his grace that draws toward salvation on all morally responsible people. With respect to the gospel, seventeenth century Arminian Bishop, Laurence Womack, well said, “on all those to whom the word of faith is preached, the Holy Spirit bestows, or is ready to bestow, so much grace as is sufficient, in fitting degrees, to bring on their conversion.”

The concept of “freed will” raises a broader question of whether human beings have free will generally, apart from the realm of pleasing the Lord and doing spiritual good (again, people are not free in this area unless God empowers them). The Arminian answer is yes. People have free will in all sorts of things. By this we mean that when people are free with respect to an action, then they can at least either do the action or refrain from doing it. People often have genuine choices and are therefore correspondingly able to make choices. When free, the specific choice someone makes has not been efficiently predetermined or necessitated by anyone or anything other than the person himself. In fact, if the person’s action has been rendered necessary by someone else, and the person cannot avoid doing the action, then he has no choice in the matter

and he is not free in it. And if he does not have a choice, then neither can it properly be said that he chooses. But Scripture very clearly indicates that people have choices and make choices about many things (e.g., Deut 23:16; 30:19; Josh 24:15; 2 Sam 24:12; 1 Kings 18:23, 25; 1 Chron 21:10; Acts 15:22, 25; Phil 1:22). Moreover, it explicitly speaks of human free will (Exod 35:29; 36:3; Lev 7:16; 22:18, 21, 23; 23:38; Num 15:3; 29:39; Deut 12:6, 17; 16:10; 2 Chron 31:14; 35:8; Ezra 1:4, 6; 3:5; 7:16; 8:28; Ps 119:108; Ezek 46:12; Amos 4:5; 2 Cor 8:3; Philemon 1:14; cf. 1 Cor 7:37) and attests to human beings violating God's will, showing that he does not predetermine their will or actions in sin. Furthermore, the fact that God holds people accountable for their choices and actions implies that those choices and actions were free. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Arminians do not believe in unlimited free will. There are many things in which we are not free. We cannot choose to fly by flapping our arms for example. Nor do we deny that our free actions are influenced by all sorts of causes. But when we are free, those causes are resistible and we have a genuine choice in what we do and are not caused necessarily to act in a certain way by God or anyone or anything other than ourselves.

Finally, the concept of freed will also implies that God has ultimate and absolute free will. For it is God who supernaturally frees the will of sinners by his grace to believe in Christ, which is a matter of God's own free will and sovereignty. God is omnipotent and sovereign, having the power and authority to do anything he wants and being unconstrained in his own actions and will by anything outside of himself and his own judgment (Gen 18:14; Exod 3:14; Job 41:11; Ps 50:10-12; Isaiah 40:13-14; Jer 32:17, 27; Matt 19:26; Luke 1:37; Acts 17:24-25; Rom 11:34-36; Eph 3:20; 2 Cor 6:18; Rev 1:8; 4:11). Nothing can happen unless he either does it or allows it. He is the Almighty Creator and God of the universe to whom we owe all love, worship, glory, honor, thanks, praise, and obedience. Therefore, it is good for us to remember that behind human freed will stands the One who frees the will, and that this is a matter of his glorious, free, and sovereign grace, totally unmerited on our part, and provided to us by the love and mercy of God. Praise his holy name!

### **Conditional Election (the C in FACTS)** [Cf. Article 1 of the 5 Articles of the Remonstrance]

There are two main views of what the Bible teaches concerning the concept of election unto salvation: that it is either conditional or unconditional. For election to be unconditional means that God's choice of those he will save has nothing to do with them, that there was nothing about them that contributed to God's decision to choose them, which seems to make God's choice of any particular individual as opposed to another arbitrary. It also implies unconditional and arbitrary reprobation, God's choice of certain individuals to not save but to damn for their sin for no reason having to do with them, which seems to contradict the spirit of numerous passages that emphasize human sin as the reason for divine condemnation as well as God's desire for people to repent and be saved (e.g., Gen 18:25; Deut 7:9, 12; 11:26-28; 30:15; 2 Chron 15:1-2; Ps 145:19; Ezekiel 18:20-24; John 3:16-18; see also "Atonement for All" above and John Wesley's treatment of reprobation including many more verses with brief commentary available at <http://evangelicalarminians.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Wesley-on-Reprobation.pdf>). For election to be conditional means that God's choice of those he will save has something to do with them, that part of his reason for choosing them was something about them. Concerning election unto salvation, the Bible teaches that God chooses for salvation those who believe in Jesus Christ and therefore become united to him, making election conditional on faith in Christ.

Desiring the salvation of all, providing atonement for all people, and taking the initiative to bring all people to salvation by issuing forth the gospel and enabling those who hear the gospel to respond to it positively in faith (see “Atonement for All” and “Freed to Believe” above), God chooses to save those who believe in the gospel/Jesus Christ (John 3:15-16, 36; 4:14; 5:24, 40; 6:47, 50-58; 20:31; Rom 3:21-30; 4:3-5, 9, 11, 13, 16, 20-24; 5:1-2; 9:30-33; 10:4, 9-13; 1 Cor 1:21; 15:1-2; Gal 2:15-16; 3:2-9, 11, 14, 22, 24, 26-28; Eph 1:13; 2:8; Phil 3:9; Heb 3:6, 14, 18-19; 4:2-3; 6:12; 1 John 2:23-25; 5:10-13, 20). This clear and basic biblical truth is tantamount to saying that election unto salvation is conditional on faith. Just as salvation is by faith (e.g., Eph 2:8 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith”), so election for salvation is by faith, a point brought out explicitly in 2 Thes 2:13 – “God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (NASB; note: “God has chosen you . . . through . . . faith in the truth”; on the grammar of this verse, see <http://evangelicalarminians.org/2-thessalonians-213-greek-grammar-and-conditional-election/>). Or as John 14:21 puts it (with the unstated assumption that love of Christ and obedience to his commandments arise from faith), “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” Or again, in the words of 1 Cor 8:3, “if anyone loves God, he is known by God.” Moreover, we find various expressions of elect/saved status to be given by faith, i.e., bestowed by God in response to faith. Believers are justified by faith (Rom 3-4; Gal 3), adopted as children of God by faith (John 1:12; Gal 3:26), heirs of God by faith (Rom 4:13-16; Gal 3:24-29; Titus 3:7; cf. Rom 8:16-17), given spiritual life (= regenerated) by faith (John 1:12-13; 3:14-16; John 5:24, 39-40; 6:47, 50-58; 20:31; Eph 2:4-8 [note that being saved here is equated with being raised to spiritual life etc., and that this is then said to take place by faith]; Col 2:12; 1 Tim 1:16; Tit 3:7), sanctified by faith (Acts 26:18), given the Holy Spirit by faith (John 4:14; 7:38-39; Acts 2:33; Rom 5:1, 5; Eph 1:13-14; Gal. 3:1-6, 14), indwelt by the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit by faith (with the previous parenthesis, see John 14:15-17, 23; 17:20-23; Eph 3:14-17), and united to Christ by faith (John 6:53-57; 14:23; 17:20-23; Eph. 1:13-14; 2; 3:17; Gal. 3:26-28; Rom 6; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21).

We should be careful not to miss the expression of elect status in these various states of grace. The state of justification means to be in right relationship with God. But that implies belonging to him as one of his elect people. Adoption/sonship is also a classic Old Testament expression of the covenantal election of the people of God (Exod 4:22-23). It involves the idea of belonging to God in the most profound way possible for human beings. Heirship flows directly out of this as an expression of election. Sons, who belong to God, are heirs of his covenantal blessings and promises (Rom 8:16-17). Spiritual life also implies elect status because it is one of the blessings provided in the covenant. But its connection to covenantal elect status is even greater, as John 17:3 reveals not only that those who belong to Jesus receive eternal life, but that eternal life is knowing God/Christ, which is best understood as intimate covenantal relationship involving elect status: “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

The fact that the Holy Spirit is given to believers on the condition of faith in Christ is also profoundly supportive of conditional election. For in Scripture the presence of God/the Holy Spirit is the bestower and marker of election. As Moses prays in Exod 33:15-16: “If your



presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?” Or as Paul states in Rom 8:9-10, “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. *But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.* If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (emphasis added). The giving of the Spirit conveys election, and having the Spirit makes a person elect. Thus, having the Spirit also marks a person out as elect. But the Spirit is given to believers by faith, making election to be also by faith.

From a non-traditional Arminian view (see below on differing Arminian views of election), this accords with the facts that the Holy Spirit sanctifies believers and sanctification is sometimes identified as the means by which election is accomplished (2 Thes 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2). To sanctify means “to make holy, set apart for God.” The initial sanctifying work of the Spirit is roughly equivalent to election—believers are chosen or set apart as belonging to God and for service and obedience to him. The Apostle Paul told the church of the Thessalonians, “God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (2 Thes 2:13; NASB). Election is here presented as taking place through or by sanctification that the Holy Spirit performs. But as we have seen, the Holy Spirit is received by faith, making the sanctification he brings also conditional on faith and shedding light on the mention of “faith in the truth” immediately following in 2 Thes 2:13. Similarly, 1 Pet 1:1-2 speaks of “elect exiles . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood . . .” Election takes place in or by or through the sanctification effected by the Spirit. That is, a person becomes elect when the Holy Spirit sets him apart as belonging to God, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood (i.e., the forgiveness of sins), an act consequent on the giving of the Spirit, which again is itself consequent on faith in Christ.

The final state of grace of those mentioned above for us to consider is union with Christ, which is the most fundamental of them all, serving as the ground of each. As Eph 1:3 states concerning the Church, God “has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.” The phrase “in Christ” indicates union with Christ, a state entered into by faith, as mentioned above. In Eph 1:3, union with Christ is given as the condition for God’s blessing of the Church. That is, God has blessed the Church with every spiritual blessing as a consequence of its being united to Christ (cf. Rom 9:7b—“Through [literally, “in”] Isaac shall your offspring be named,” which clearly means that Abraham’s offspring would be named as a consequence of being in Isaac, i.e., those connected to Isaac would be counted as Abraham’s offspring). One of the spiritual blessings specified as among every spiritual blessing with which the Church has been blessed is election (Eph 1:4). Now if God has blessed the Church with every spiritual blessing as a consequence of its being united to Christ, and election is one of those blessings, then that means that election is conditional on union with Christ and the faith by which that union is established.

More directly, Eph 1:4 then explicitly indicates the condition of election specifically with the phrase “in him [Christ]”: “he [God] chose us in him before the foundation of the world.” Just as

God blessing us in Christ with every spiritual blessing indicates that God has blessed us because we are in Christ (Eph 1:3), so God choosing us in Christ indicates that God chose us because of our union with Christ (Eph 1:4). Ephesians 1:4, therefore, articulates conditional election, an election that is conditional on union with Christ. But the fact that union with Christ is conditional on faith in him makes election also conditional on faith in Christ.

The next phrase in Eph 1:4—“before the foundation of the world”—brings us to a difference of opinion among Arminians on the nature of conditional election. The traditional view conceives of conditional election as individualistic, with God choosing separately before the foundation of the world each individual he foreknew would freely be in Christ by faith and persevere in that faith-union. The view seems to find striking support in two prominent passages that relate to election.

Romans 8:29 says, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” Now without question, God’s foreknowledge of human beings is total and would include prior knowledge of each person and whether they would believe or not. And in Rom 8:29, divine foreknowledge is presented as the condition for predestination. Given all that we have said so far, many would find God’s foreknowledge of the faith of believers to be the most natural element of his foreknowledge of them to be determinative for his decision to save them and predestine them to be conformed to the image of Christ.

The other prominent passage providing support for election being conditioned on divine foreknowledge of human faith is 1 Pet 1:1-2, which speaks of elect status as being “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood . . .” Here elect status is explicitly said to be based on God’s foreknowledge. And again, the type of evidence we have been reviewing leads many to believe that it is especially foreknowledge of the faith of believers that is in view as that to which the divine election conforms. Since this text does not specify the foreknowledge in view to be of people, another option compatible with both main Arminian views of election would take divine foreknowledge in 1 Pet 1:2 to be of God’s own plan of salvation, meaning election is based on God’s plan to save those who believe.

The non-traditional Arminian view of election is known as corporate election. It observes that the election of God’s people in the Old Testament was a consequence of the choice of an individual who represented the group, the corporate head and representative. In other words, the group was elected in the corporate head, that is, as a consequence of its association with this corporate representative (Gen 15:18; 17:7-10, 19; 21:12; 24:7; 25:23; 26:3-5; 28:13-15; Deut 4:37; 7:6-8; 10:15; Mal 1:2-3). Moreover, individuals (such as Rahab and Ruth) who were not naturally related to the corporate head could join the chosen people and thereby share in the covenant head’s and elect people’s identity, history, election, and covenant blessings. There was a series of covenant heads in the Old Testament—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the choice of each new covenant head brought a new definition of God’s people based on the identity of the covenant head (in addition to the references earlier in this paragraph, see Rom 9:6-13). Finally, Jesus Christ came as the head of the New Covenant (Rom 3-4; 8; Gal 3-4; Heb 9:15; 12:24)—he is the Chosen One (Mark 1:11; 9:7; 12:6; Luke 9:35; 20:13; 23:35; Eph 1:6; Col 1:13; and

numerous references to Jesus as the Christ/Messiah)—and anyone united to him comes to share in his identity, history, election, and covenant blessings (we become co-heirs with Christ – Rom 8:16-17; cf. Gal 3:24-29). Thus, election is “in Christ” (Eph 1:4), a consequence of union with him by faith. Just as God’s people in the Old Covenant were chosen in Jacob/Israel, so God’s people in the New Covenant are chosen in Christ.

Some have mistakenly taken Paul’s appeal in Romans 9 to the discretionary election of the former covenant heads to be an indication that the election of God’s people for salvation is unconditional. But the election of the covenant head is unique, entailing the election of all who are identified with him rather than that each individual member of the elect people was chosen as an individual to become part of the elect people in the same manner as the corporate head was chosen. In harmony with his great stress in Romans on salvation/justification being by faith in Christ, Paul appeals to God’s discretionary election of Isaac and Jacob in order to defend God’s right to make election to be by faith in Christ rather than works or ancestry, as his conclusion to the section bears out, referring to the elect state of righteousness: “<sup>30</sup> What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; <sup>31</sup> but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. <sup>32</sup> Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works” (Rom 9:30-32b). (For a good article on Romans 9, see <http://evangelicalarminians.org/romans-9-an-arminiannew-perspective-reading/>.)

Paul’s olive tree metaphor in Rom 11:17-24 gives an excellent picture of the corporate election perspective. The olive tree represents the chosen people of God. But individuals get grafted into the elect people and participate in election and its blessings by faith or get cut off from God’s chosen people and their blessings because of unbelief. The focus of election is the corporate people of God with individuals participating in election by means of their participation (through faith) in the elect group, which spans salvation history. Ephesians 2:11-22 similarly attests that Gentiles who believe in Christ are in him made to be part of the commonwealth of Israel, fellow citizens with the saints, members of God’s household, and possessors of the covenants of promise (2:11-22; note especially vv. 12, 19).

While agreeing that God knows the future, including who will believe, the corporate election perspective would tend to understand the references to foreknowledge in Rom 8:29 and 1 Pet 1:1-2 as referring to a relational prior knowing that amounts to previously acknowledging or recognizing or embracing or choosing people as belonging to God (i.e., in covenant relationship/partnership). The Bible sometimes mentions this type of knowledge, such as when Jesus speaks of those who never truly submit to his lordship: “And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (Matt 7:23; cf. Gen 18:19; Jer 1:5; Hos 13:4-5; Amos 3:2; 1 Cor 8:3). On this view, to be chosen according to foreknowledge would mean to be chosen because of the prior election of Christ and the corporate people of God in him. “Those [plural] whom he foreknew” in Rom 8:29 would refer to the Church as a corporate body and their election in Christ as well as their identity as the legitimate continuation of the historic chosen covenant people of God, which individual believers share in by faith-union with Christ and membership in his people. Such a reference is akin to statements in Scripture spoken to Israel about God choosing them in the past (i.e., foreknowing them), an election that the contemporary generation being addressed shared in (e.g., Deut 4:37; 7:6-7; 10:15; 14:2; Isaiah 41:8-9; 44:1-2; Amos 3:2). In every generation, Israel could be said to have been chosen.

The Church now shares in that election through Christ, the covenant head and mediator (Rom 11:17-24; Eph 2:11-22).

Similarly, to be chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world would refer to sharing in Christ's election that took place before the foundation of the world (1 Pet 1:20). Because Christ embodies and represents his people, it can be said that his people were chosen when he was just as it could be said that the nation of Israel was in the womb of Rebekah before its existence because Jacob was (Gen. 25:23) and that God loved/chose Israel by loving/choosing Jacob before the nation of Israel ever existed (Mal. 1:2-3) and that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek in Abraham before Levi existed (Heb. 7:9-10) and that the church died, rose, and was seated with Christ before the Church ever existed (Eph 2:5-6; cf. Col. 2:11-14; Rom 6:1-14) and that we (the Church) are seated in the heavenlies in Christ when we are not literally yet in Heaven but Christ is. Christ's election entails the election of those who are united to him, and so our election can be said to have taken place when his did, even before we were actually united to him. This is somewhat similar to how I, as an American, can say that we (America) won the Revolutionary War before I or any American alive today was ever born.

The corporate view explains why only those who are actually God's people are called elect or similar appellations in Scripture and not those who do not belong to God but one day will. In the New Testament, only believers are identified as elect. As Rom 8:9 states, "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." Similarly, Rom 11:7-24 supports the corporate understanding of the elect as referring only to those who are actually in Christ by faith rather than also including certain unbelievers who have been chosen to believe from eternity. For in Rom 11.7, "the rest" are not elect. But Paul believed that those from 'the rest' could yet believe, revealing that the elect is a dynamic term that allows for departure from and entry into the elect as portrayed in the passage's olive tree metaphor. Since the election of the individual derives from the election of Christ and the corporate people of God, individuals become elect when they believe and remain elect only as long as they believe. Hence, 2 Pet 1:10 urges believers to "be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure" (NIV) and the New Testament is filled with warnings to persevere in the faith to avoid forfeiting election/salvation (see "Security in Christ" below; for an introduction to corporate election with links to further resources, see <http://evangelicalarminians.org/a-concise-summary-of-the-corporate-view-of-election-and-predestination/>).

By way of summary, there are two different views of election conditioned on faith. First, individual election is the classic view, in which God individually chose each believer based upon his foreknowledge of each one's faith and so predestined each to eternal life. Second, corporate election is the main alternative view, holding that election to salvation is primarily of the Church as a people and embraces individuals only in faith-union with Christ the Chosen One and as members of his people. Moreover, since the election of the individual derives from the election of Christ and the corporate people of God, individuals become elect when they believe and remain elect only as long as they believe. Conditional election is supported in Scripture by (see the above discussion for explanation): (1) direct statement; (2) salvation being by faith; (3) various expressions of elect status being by faith; (4) the presentation of election as based on God's foreknowledge, whether that be of human faith or equivalent to the prior choice of Christ and/or the people of God as a corporate body that individuals participate in by faith; (5) election

being “in Christ,” which is a state that is itself conditional on faith; (6) the language of election being applied only to believers and not unbelievers who would later believe; (7) God’s desire for the salvation of all; (8) the provision of atonement for all; (9) the issuing of the gospel call to all; (10) the drawing of all toward faith in Christ; (11) human free will (for numbers 7-11, see “Atonement for All” and “Freed to Believe” above); and (12) numerous warnings against forsaking the faith and thereby forfeiting elect status and its blessing of salvation.

The doctrine of conditional election centers election on Christ by making it conditional on union with him rather than reducing Christ’s role to being the means by which election is accomplished. Moreover, conditional election underscores God’s gracious initiative in salvation towards totally depraved people and encourages humility and worship at the amazing grace of God in choosing those who deserve Hell for adoption into his family, salvation, and every spiritual blessing, a free gift received by faith (the non-meritorious condition for election) at the greatest cost to God, who sacrificed his own Son to be able to choose us, and at the greatest cost to Jesus Christ, who died for us so that we could be chosen by God. All praise and glory to God alone!

### **Security in Christ (the S in FACTS)** [Cf. Article 5 of the 5 Articles of the Remonstrance]

At base, “Security in Christ” means that a person’s salvation is secure as long as he is in Christ, that is, as long as he believes/trusts in Christ and therefore remains in faith-union with Christ. The security of salvation should be grounded in Christ, the promises of his word, and our faith-relationship with him rather than in some unknowable divine decree by which God is said to have chosen certain people for salvation unconditionally. An unconditional divine decree that cannot be known until the end of life or time does not provide for assurance of salvation and makes the security of salvation of no value for the confidence of believers.

Arminians differ among themselves on the more specific nature of the security of salvation. There is some question of whether Arminius himself believed in the possibility of apostasy (a word meaning forsaking the faith) for true believers or whether he was undecided about the issue. But most scholars agree that Arminius did believe that true believers can fall away from faith in Christ and therefore salvation. On the other hand, the early Arminians, who were known as the Remonstrants and sided with Arminius in the theological debates of 17<sup>th</sup> century Holland, were originally undecided about whether true believers could commit apostasy. But they ultimately came to the conclusion that they can.

Traditionally, Arminians have believed that true believers can forsake faith in Christ and so perish as unbelievers, forfeiting their salvation, and the Arminian theological label has normally included this doctrinal position. However, the facts that there is some question of Arminius’ own position, and the early Arminians, along with the first confessional statement of Arminian theology, which they penned, known as “The Five Articles of Remonstrance,” explicitly indicated uncertainty about whether apostasy is possible for true believers, suggests that the doctrine is not an essential element of Arminian theology conceptually. Therefore, it seems best to classify as Arminians those who agree with Arminianism on every other point of dispute regarding the doctrine of salvation. More precisely, they may be considered “4 point Arminians” or “moderate Arminians,” yet Arminians nonetheless. Moderate Arminians could use the “S” in

FACTS to articulate their belief that security in Christ means in part that God will make sure that believers do not forsake their faith and therefore perish as unbelievers. But this description of the Arminian doctrine of security/perseverance will focus on the traditional Arminian position of belief in the possibility of apostasy since this is a historic and distinctive even if not essential Arminian position.

All Arminians (not to mention traditional Calvinists) agree that persevering in faith is necessary for final salvation. Indeed, the position that it is unnecessary (held by what are sometimes called “Moderate Calvinists”) was virtually non-existent until the twentieth century. Perhaps just as shocking is that the position that agrees that persevering in faith is necessary for final salvation but holds that it is impossible for true believers to turn away from their faith is not advocated in any extant Christian writings until some 1500 years into church history! While such historical considerations cannot be decisive in theological matters, they do offer a strong caution to those holding these more novel positions and weigh in favor of the traditional Arminian position.

The fact that salvation is conditional on faith (see “Atonement for All” and “Conditional Election” above) and that condemnation is partly conditional on unbelief (John 3:16-18, 36) implies that continuing in faith is necessary for final salvation. To put it simply, believers will be saved, but unbelievers will perish. If someone goes from being an unbeliever to being a believer, then he will be saved, and if someone goes from being a believer to an unbeliever, then he will be lost. We see this sort of idea quite clearly in Ezekiel 33:13-19,

<sup>13</sup> Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. . . <sup>14</sup> Again, though I say to the wicked, “You shall surely die,” yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right . . . and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. <sup>16</sup> None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live. . . <sup>18</sup> When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it. <sup>19</sup> And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he shall live by this. (Compare the similar principle with regard to nations in Jer 18:7-11.)

Or as Deut 29:18-20 states,

Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison. <sup>19</sup> When such a person hears the words of this oath, he invokes a blessing on himself and therefore thinks, “I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way” . . . <sup>20</sup> The LORD will never be willing to forgive him; his wrath and zeal will burn against that man. All the curses written in this book will fall upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven. (NIV)

The prophetic word recorded in 2 Chron 15:2 states the principle in yet another way: “Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the LORD is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.”

In the New Testament, a similar sort of principle applies to faith in Christ and salvation. Second Timothy 2:12 states quite plainly, “if we endure, we will also reign with him [Christ]. If we disown him, he will also disown us” (NIV). And in contrast to persecution and spiritual deception, Jesus declares, “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt 24:13). Indeed, one of the main concerns of the Lord’s Olivet Discourse is to warn his followers to be watchful and vigilant to persevere in loyalty to Jesus despite various pressures or temptations to go astray lest they be shut out from his kingdom and salvation (Matt 24:4, 13, 23-24, 26, 42-51; 25:1-13, 26-30). There are many such warnings in the New Testament, testifying to the possibility of apostasy since it is pointless to warn against impossibilities. (The position that apostasy is impossible and the warnings guarantee that true believers will obey the warnings is untenable because the believer is supposed to know that he is being warned against doing something he cannot do and consequences he can never experience, which nullifies the motivation to obey the warnings.) There are biblical passages that might sound like they unconditionally guarantee believers salvation so that it is to be assumed that God will make sure believers do not turn from faith. But the thought that believers can forsake their faith and forfeit salvation is a pervasive concern in the New Testament, seen in numerous passages whether directly or indirectly. Hence, passages that might seem unconditional because they do not explicitly state a condition are better understood to assume the condition of perseverance in faith and the ability to forsake faith rather than to assume that God will not allow the believer to stop believing. Passages that refer directly to apostasy, those that indicate conditionality or uncertainty concerning present believers’ attainment of final salvation, and those that warn believers against turning from Christ and so perishing all manifest the possibility of true believers making shipwreck of their faith.

In Mark 8:38, Jesus warned his disciples, “For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” Elsewhere he warned them, “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet” (Matt 5:13). In Matt 6:15, Jesus warns, “if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” The significance of that warning is illustrated vividly in the parable of the unforgiving servant, in which a king forgives his servant but then withdraws that forgiveness because the servant does not forgive his fellow servant. The conclusion of the parable is striking: “<sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” <sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (Matt 18:32-35). The message is clear: even if a person’s sins have been forgiven and, therefore, that person is saved, God will cancel that person’s forgiveness if he does not forgive fellow believers, revoking his salvation.

However, since salvation and justification are by faith and not works, and faith yields obedience (Rom 1:5; 14:23; 16:26; Gal 5:6; 1 Thes 1:3; 2 The 1:11; Heb 11; James 2:14-26), these types of

passages should not be taken to indicate that sinning in itself results in the forfeiture of salvation (though some Arminians believe this), whether by any sin whatsoever or certain egregious sins. Rather, ongoing refusal to repent of sin by one who has been a believer and continues to profess to be a believer reflects that the person is no longer truly trusting in Christ as Lord and Savior, and it is the forsaking of genuine faith that actually leads to practical rejection of Christ's lordship and the loss of salvation, even if the person still professes faith in Christ. As Paul mentions in Titus 1:16, there are some who "profess to know God, but they deny him by their works." Indeed, Jesus stated that the Father cuts off every person in him who does not bear fruit and urged his disciples to remain in him, which would bring them to bear fruit (John 15:1-6). Here we have a picture of someone being in Christ, a state of salvation, and then taken out of Christ, i.e., taken out of that state of salvation (union with Christ) to an unsaved state. As Jesus declares in John 15:6, "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned," an image of final judgment. Since union with Christ and obedience are by faith (see "Conditional Election" above and the references at the beginning of this paragraph), failure to produce fruit reveals that faith has been abandoned and the Father removes the practical apostate from union with Christ. This is partly why Jesus urges his disciples to remain in him, which most basically means to continue trusting in him, which would be a senseless exhortation if it were impossible for them to leave him.

In his explanation of the parable of the sower in Luke's Gospel, Jesus indicates that believing brings salvation (Luke 8:12), but speaks of some "who receive the word with joy when they hear it . . . They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away" (Luke 8:13; NIV). He also speaks of some who produce fruit that does not last (literally, it does not mature) because it is "choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life" (Luke 8:7, 14 [quote from the NIV]). All of the unfaithful responses to God's word in the parable are contrasted to a faithful response that perseveres in adherence to the word (Luke 8:15). Clearly, holding fast to the word is implicitly commended by the parable and turning away from the word is implicitly condemned. However, if those who fall away merely fall away from some sort of false faith, then that could not be presented as a particularly bad thing. Rather, the parable warns against falling away from true faith and urges perseverance in the same. As Jesus said to a man who promised to follow him after saying goodbye to his family, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

In Rom 8:13 the Apostle Paul warned believers, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." More pointedly, in Romans 11, addressing Gentile believers and contrasting them with unbelieving Jews, Paul warns them that God will cut them off from his people if they do not continue in faith:

They [the unbelieving Jews] were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. <sup>21</sup> For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. <sup>22</sup> Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. <sup>23</sup> And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again (Rom 11:20-23).



Only belief in the possibility of apostasy can do justice to this text. The doctrine known as “eternal security” or “once saved, always saved,” whether in the form of inevitable perseverance or of unnecessary perseverance, aims to convince the believer not to fear that he could be cut off from God’s people and their salvation for some reason. But this is the very opposite of Paul’s intention here, where he expressly calls upon believers to fear being cut off from God’s people for unbelief.

Paul himself feared that believers might forsake Christ and perish. He was concerned that the actions of some believers might lead other believers astray and destroy them (Rom 14:15, 20-21; 1 Cor 8:9-13; cf. 3:16-17). More strikingly, he warned the Corinthians against perishing through unfaithfulness, using the example of Israel (1 Cor 10:1-13) and eventually declaring, “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall (1 Cor 10:12). He had already warned, “<sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10). He further told the Corinthians, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand,<sup>2</sup> and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain” (1 Cor 15:1-2). Later, when they had fallen under the influence of false teachers (referred to, for example, in 2 Cor 11:1-6, 12-15), he told them, “<sup>2</sup> For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.<sup>3</sup> But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.<sup>4</sup> For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough” (2 Cor 11:2-4). He also urged them “not to receive the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor 6:1), exhorted them, “<sup>5</sup> 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!<sup>6</sup> I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test” (2 Cor 13:5-6). He further prayed for their restoration (2 Cor 13:9).

One of the main purposes of Paul’s epistle to the believers in Galatia was to persuade them not to turn from Christ to a false gospel. It appears that they were in the process of doing this very thing, and so Paul’s epistle argues with urgency and passion to rescue them from that disastrous path. Early in the epistle, he exclaims, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel” (Gal 1:6), such a serious matter that Paul further exclaims, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.<sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8-9). Paul was deeply concerned for the souls of the Galatian Christians, crying out, “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” (Gal 3:1a-b). Their folly lay in turning from faith to works for possession of the Spirit and membership in God’s people (Gal 3:2-6), which would make their suffering for their faith vain (Gal 3:4) since it would forfeit their salvation if held on to. Therefore, he reminded them that “all who rely on works of the law are under a curse” (Gal 3:10) and asked them, “But now that you have come to

know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?” (Gal 4:9). He referred to these believers as “my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19) and stated plainly that he was perplexed about them (Gal 4:20). Some of them desired to be under the law (Gal 4:21).

In Gal 5:1-4, Paul makes it absolutely clear that true believers (to whom his words were addressed) can turn from faith and grace, and end up not benefitting from Christ (i.e., not saved):

<sup>1</sup> For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. <sup>2</sup> Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. <sup>3</sup> I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace (Gal 5:1-4).

In 5:1, there would be no reason for Paul to exhort the Galatian Christians not to submit *again* to a yoke of slavery if it were not possible for them to do so. Nor would it make sense in 5:2 for him to warn them that accepting circumcision would make Christ to be of no advantage to them, which would mean no salvation. Strikingly, in 5:4 Paul states that some of the Galatian Christians were severed from Christ, which he describes as having fallen away from grace. It would be hard to imagine a clearer succinct expression of the forfeiture of saving relationship with Christ, though Paul was seeking to win those in view back to saving faith as well as warn others not to follow that same doomed path. The situation of the Galatian church heading toward embracing a false gospel and some of them even having done so left Paul saying, “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you” (Gal 5:7-8).

After listing the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21a), Paul warns the Galatian believers once again: I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:21b). And then yet again: “<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. <sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

<sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (Gal 6:7-9). He issued a similar type of warning in Eph 5:5-7: “<sup>5</sup> For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them.” Note that in these last two places there is a warning not to be deceived about this matter, as if Paul was already countering teaching that believers cannot actually turn from their faith and live in sin or that believers can live in sin and still be saved. The very fact that Paul warns believers against these things implies that they can fall into them and experience the threatened consequences.

The Epistle to the Colossians is also addressed to believers who were facing false teaching and were in danger of forsaking the true gospel. Therefore, Paul prayed for their perseverance (Col

1:11) and underscored that their present reconciliation to God would issue forth in final acceptance “if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting away from the hope of the gospel that you heard” (Col 1:23; cf. 1 Tim 2:15). Moreover, he urged them to continue walking with Christ as their Lord (Col 2:6) and warned them: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8).

As for the Church of the Thessalonians, Paul was greatly concerned that they might forsake their faith because of persecution, which makes little sense if he thought that God would not let them forsake their faith. As Paul recounted to them,

<sup>1</sup> Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, <sup>2</sup> and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, <sup>3</sup> that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. <sup>4</sup> For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. <sup>5</sup> For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. (1 Thes 3:1-5).

At a later time, he exhorted them, “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter (2 Thes 2:15), which would be unnecessary if they could not fail to stand firm (cf. Eph 6:10-18).

Paul warned Timothy against false teachers who had swerved from “love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:5-6) and by doing so “wandered away into vain discussions” (1 Tim 1:6), apparently men who had been true believers but went astray. Indeed, Paul mentions to Timothy that by rejecting a good conscience, “some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim 1:19-20). But one cannot make shipwreck of one's faith if one never had faith to shipwreck. Hymenaeus and Alexander are probably examples of what Paul relates in 1 Tim 4:1-2, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, <sup>2</sup> through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.” Even one of Paul's coworkers, Demas, turned away from the Lord for love of the World (2 Tim 4:10; cf. Col 4:14; Philem 23). One of the things that leads believers to turn from their faith is the love of money: “<sup>9</sup> But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs (1Tim 6:9-10). Another cause of apostasy Paul mentioned to Timothy is false knowledge (1 Tim 6:20-21). He even needed to warn Timothy to guard himself against it: <sup>20</sup> O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’— <sup>21</sup> which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. (1Tim 6:20-21 NASB; italics removed). Indeed, Timothy was to, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which

you were called” (1 Tim 6:12) and he was also to instruct rich believers to be generous with their money “so that they may take hold of that which is truly life” (1 Tim 6:18-19). Even Timothy needed to be exhorted to “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed” (2 Tim 3:14) and to, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1Tim 4:16). For that matter, Paul not only counseled the Corinthians to exercise total focus and great self-discipline in pursuing eternal life, but he also spoke of his need for the same in order that he himself would not be disqualified from eternal life:

<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. <sup>25</sup> Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup> So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. <sup>27</sup> But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified (1 Cor 9:24-27).

The main purpose of the Book of Hebrews is to encourage its audience of believers not to forsake their faith in Christ but to persevere in him. Warnings against apostasy pervade the book (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:1-29). Here are some representative verses:

- <sup>1</sup> “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. <sup>2</sup> For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, <sup>3</sup> how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (Heb 2:1-3a)
- “And we are his [God’s] house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.” (Heb 3:6b)
- <sup>12</sup> “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. <sup>15</sup> As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” (Heb 3:12-15)
- “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.” (Heb 4:11; falling here refers in context to falling under God’s fatal judgment because of unbelief; see 3:16-4:3).
- “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.” (Heb 4:14)
- <sup>4</sup> “For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and then have

fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.” (Heb 6:4-6)

- <sup>11</sup> And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup> so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Heb 6:11-12)
- <sup>17</sup> So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.” (Heb 6:17-18)
- “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” (Heb 10:23)
- <sup>29</sup> How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup> For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ <sup>31</sup> It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. <sup>32</sup> But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, <sup>33</sup> sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. <sup>34</sup> For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. <sup>35</sup> Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. <sup>36</sup> For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. <sup>37</sup> For, ‘Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; <sup>38</sup> but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.’ <sup>39</sup> But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.” (Heb 10:29-39; note that v. 38 speaks of a believer, who is righteous by faith, shrinking back from faith and drawing God’s displeasure, and that this consequence is equated with destruction in contrast to persevering in faith yielding salvation of the soul.)
- <sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.” (Heb 12:1-3)

- “Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,<sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. (Heb 12:12-13)
- <sup>15</sup> “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;<sup>16</sup> that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.<sup>17</sup> For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. (Heb 12:15-17)
- “See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For<sup>a</sup> 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)

The Epistle of James also testifies to the possibility and danger of apostasy in 5:19-20, <sup>19</sup> “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back,<sup>20</sup> let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (Jam 5:19-20). This statement is aimed at believers (“brothers”), and considers it possible that some of them could wander from the truth, which would result in spiritual death for the wanderer unless he comes to repentance.

First Peter 1:5 gives insight into the nature of Christian security of salvation—it is conditional on faith. For it speaks of us “who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Hence, the biblical doctrine of salvation security is best described as conditional rather than unconditional or inevitable. As the believer trusts in God, the Lord guards his salvation. But as we have seen, if the believer stops trusting in the Lord, then the Lord will revoke his salvation. Thus, Peter exhorted his believing audience, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.<sup>9</sup> Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Pet 5:8-9).

In 2 Pet 1:5-11, the Apostle exhorted his audience of believers to grow in godly virtues because doing so would keep them from falling and so failing to enter the eternal kingdom of Christ. It is in this context that Peter gives the remarkable exhortation, “Therefore, brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet 1:10; NIV). The wording of this exhortation is not to make ourselves sure about our calling and election, but to make our calling and election themselves sure/firm, which is then tied to not falling and indicated as being accomplished by practicing the Christian virtues that were already said to be what would keep Peter’s readers secure: “for if you practice these qualities you will never fall” (2 Pet 1:10b).

Peter goes on to spend a good deal of his second epistle warning his believing audience of false teachers and their spiritually destructive teaching (2 Pet 2-3), who had forsaken “the right way” and had “gone astray” (2 Pet 2:15). “[T]hey entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error” (2 Pet 2:18b). That implies the enticement of genuine believers since they are escaping—even if barely—from those who live in error. Sadly, Peter warned “many will follow their sensuality” (2 Pet 2:2a). Peter’s warning is grave indeed:

<sup>20</sup> For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. <sup>21</sup> For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. <sup>22</sup> What the true proverb says has happened to them: The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire. (2 Pet 2:20-22)

This warning refers to believers who go astray, since they had “escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 2:20; cf. 1:4, 8).

The Epistle of Jude is also dedicated to warning believers against false teaching and encouraging them to resist it and persevere in the truth. After describing the false teachers and the divine judgment set upon them, Jude exhorts his believing audience, “<sup>20</sup> But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life” (Jude 1:20-21). There would be no reason to warn and exhort genuine believers to keep themselves in the love of God and wait for Christ’s mercy of eternal life in the face of false teaching if they could not forsake God’s love and give up on Christ’s mercy.

The Book of Revelation is yet another New Testament book that has exhorting its readers to persevere in the faith as one of its primary purposes. The seven churches addressed by the book were under pressure to give up or compromise their faith from various temptations. While the whole book carries this concern (see e.g., Rev 13:10; 14:12), it comes out most clearly in the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2-3. Each of the churches is exhorted to be faithful to Christ and promised eternal life (described in various ways) if they are faithful to the end. The clear implication is that they will not be saved if they are not faithful to Christ and it is possible for them to be unfaithful and perish.

For example, the church of Ephesus is promised: “To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7b). The obvious implication is that the one who does not conquer (i.e., is not faithful to Jesus; cf. Rev 12:11; 15:2; 1 John 5:4-5) will not be allowed to eat of the tree of life (i.e., will not be given eternal life). The church of Smyrna is promised: “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life . . . The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death” (Rev 2:10c, 2:11b). The obvious implication is that the one who is not faithful unto death will not be given the crown of life and the one who does not conquer will be hurt by the second death. Similarly, the church of Sardis is promised: “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels” (Rev 3:5). The obvious implication is that the one who does not conquer will not be clothed in white garments and *will be blotted out of the book of life* and will not be confessed before the Father and the angels. The reference to blotting out of the book of life is especially instructive on the question of salvation security. For blotting a name out of the book of life implies that the name

was in the book and that the person identified by the name was saved. But blotting out of the book indicates the removal of salvation and eternal life.

Most of the churches are also explicitly threatened with judgment if they are not faithful to Christ. For example, Christ told the church of Ephesus, “I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” (Rev 2:5). Removing a church’s lampstand is a figure for removing its identity as God’s people, a transfer into an unsaved state. More vividly, Christ threatened the church of Laodicea, “because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth” (Rev 3:16), a threat to those who are in Christ of ejecting them out of Christ into an unsaved state.

Near the very end of Revelation, Jesus issues a grave warning: “if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (Rev 22:19). This warning seems to be addressed mainly to believers, since the original audience of the book was indeed believers. It probably includes unbelievers in a secondary way, which supports conditional election, resistible grace, and unlimited atonement, because for people to have a share in Heaven that is taken away from them must at the very least mean Heaven was genuinely available to them through genuine opportunity to believe and be saved. But the warning was originally for believers mainly, and this supports conditional security, for it warns those who are destined for Heaven against the forfeiture of that destiny through taking “away from the words of the book of this prophecy.”

Despite all of this concern and warning in the New Testament with respect to apostasy and forfeiting salvation, believers have good grounds for strong assurance of salvation. Before explaining why, it would be helpful to attend to the fact that the New Testament speaks of salvation in three tenses—past, present, and future. Believers were saved in the past when they first placed their trust in Christ and came to share in the salvation he accomplished on the cross (it can also be said that we were saved when Jesus died and rose again in the same way that a winning score in a sports game can be said to have won the game even before the game is actually finished). So Scripture speaks of believers as having been saved in the past (Rom 8:24; Eph 2:5, 8; 2 Tim 1:8-9; Titus 3:4-7). But it also speaks of believers as being saved in the present (1 Cor 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor 2:15) or enjoying a present state of salvation (Eph 2:5, 8; the Greek construction in these verses indicates a present state of salvation resulting from past salvation) since we enjoy numerous spiritual blessings of God in the present, such as those discussed under “Conditional Election” above and sanctification, a present continual process of growth in Christ and increasing conformity to his image (Rom 6:12-23; 12:1-2; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:21-24; Phil 3:12-14). However, we do not yet have these salvation blessings in their fullness. This is the well-known concept of “the already and the not yet,” that is, that we have the salvation blessings of God now only partially, but that we will receive them in their fullness when Christ returns and brings the culmination of the kingdom of God and our eternal state. Thus, the New Testament speaks of future salvation (Rom 5:9-10; 6:22; 8:11, 13, 16-19, 23-25; 13:11; Gal 5:5; Phil 3:10-11, 20-21; 1 Thes 1:10; 5:9; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 1:5); believers will be fully and finally saved in the future when Jesus returns.

The fact that full and final salvation is to come in the future helps explain why perseverance in faith is necessary. The fact that there is also a substantial albeit partial experience of salvation in



the past and present helps to explain why it is that believers can have strong assurance of salvation. First, we can have full assurance of past and present salvation (1 John 5:13). If a person believes, then he can know that he has been saved and is saved according to the many promises in Scripture that God saves those who believe (see the many references under “Conditional Election”). (This presents a serious problem for the position of inevitable perseverance, which holds that true believers cannot forsake Christ, and therefore, that professing believers who fall away never were true believers or saved in the first place. For if someone can appear to be a true believer to himself and the believers around him, but then fall away and show himself to have never been a true believer, how could we ever know that we are genuine believers and not simply exhibiting a false faith and are actually unsaved and will one day show it?) Moreover, our salvation in the present brings all sorts of divine blessings in the present that are set to be fulfilled when Christ returns and will in fact be fulfilled as long as the believer perseveres in faith. These greatly encourage and empower perseverance in faith. Indeed, God protects our faith relationship with him from any outside force irresistibly snatching us away from Christ or our faith (John 10:27-29; Romans 8:31-39; 1 Cor 10:13), and he preserves us in salvation as long as we trust in Christ (1 Pet 1:3-5 and the many passages we have referenced in this article about salvation being conditional on faith). Just as the Holy Spirit empowered us to believe in Christ (see “Freed to Believe” above), so he empowers us to continue believing in Christ (Gal 5:16-25; Eph 3:14-21; cf. 1 Cor 10:13). Furthermore, since Christ died for all (see “Atonement for All” above), we can know that Christ died for us and that God is for us and our salvation (unlike a theology that holds unconditional election, irresistible grace, and limited atonement, which logically allows one to know that one is elect and that Christ died for one only after one has persevered to the end).

Thus, believers can have solid, robust assurance of salvation though not absolute or unconditional assurance. While some might find this troubling, false security is far more troubling and dangerous, potentially leading believers to ignore attending to what is necessary for perseverance, and so to falling away and perishing. It is when a person thinks that fire cannot burn him that he is much more likely to play with fire and get burned. Moreover, there is rarely unconditional assurance of anything in life, and yet people frequently have great assurance despite the absence of an unconditional guarantee. In everyday life, people frequently have substantial assurance of future benefit which is nonetheless conditional on their continuing to meet the condition for that future benefit, such as continuing to consent to receive it. Likewise, believers can have full assurance of past and present salvation, and substantial assurance of future final salvation, which is contingent on them continuing to meet the condition for that final salvation, namely, faith. And wonderfully, God promises true believers the ability to persevere in faith and that nothing can tear them away from him. With present salvation we have the absolute assurance that God will enable us to persevere unto final salvation and that God is for us. He simply does not guarantee that he will irresistibly *make* us persevere. Just as God’s grace is resistible before we believe (see “Free to Believe” above), so it continues to be resistible after we believe—and always amazing!

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 1:24-25).