

CFBC Hymns Class 25 Augustus Toplady (1740-1778) Continued

The hymn “From Whence This Fear and Unbelief” was written by Augustus Toplady (who also wrote the famous hymn “Rock of Ages”) in the 18th century. Augustus beautifully writes of Jesus’ finished and complete work, calling upon the believer to rest in Jesus’ efficacious blood. Are you struggling and doubting God’s love and acceptance of you? Bask in the comfort of Toplady’s words, who invites you to trust and rest in the Gospel’s full and final pardon.

<https://dustinhunt.com/hymns-we-should-sing-more-from-whence-this-fear-and-unbelief>

The doctrine contained in “A Debtor to Mercy Alone” is pure gold, confirming the mercy of God in our salvation, and emphasising by the grace of God those who have been truly converted will endure to the end, and most certainly cannot be lost.

<https://www.crichbaptist.org/articles/christian-poetry-hymns/poems-hymns/a-debtor-to-mercy-alone/>

Quotes from J I Packer’s Knowing God

Think against your feelings; argue yourself out of the gloom they have spread; unmask the unbelief they have nourished; take yourself in hand, talk to yourself, make yourself look up from your problems to the God of the gospel; let evangelical thinking correct emotional thinking.

There are two sorts of sick consciences, those that are not aware enough of sin and those that are not aware enough of pardon...

Now Why This Fear And Unbelief?

Edited Excerpts from “The Objectivity of Christ's Atonement”

Jon English Lee, Pastor of Morningview Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama

We live in an age that militates against the idea of God’s absolute holiness. Combined with a denial of the sinfulness of man, the rejection of God’s moral character results in a necessary de-valuing, or even denial, of the atonement.

A crucial piece of a biblical understanding of Christ's work is the objective nature of Christ's atoning work.

Definition

To say that the atonement is objective is to say that the atonement was intended to *and actually succeeded in* propitiating God's wrath and reconciling Him to the sinner.

Application of the Doctrine

So why does this doctrine of objectivity matter? Of what practical meaning does this have, other than filling the dusty old tomes of academics? I submit to you that there are several key areas of immediate application.

- First, to know that Christ actually and objectively has satisfied the wrath of God on your behalf is an immensely freeing doctrine...The believer then rests in the realization they have truly been forgiven and that the Father no more looks on them with disdain than He looks upon His own Son. We are truly set free from the reign of sin and condemnation when the Son sets us free (John 8:36).
- Second, the objectivity of the atonement guards against a faulty synergistic idea of salvation. That is, when we realize that Christ has *actually* done all the work, we remove the possibility of joining our own works in the mix. Justification cannot be merited in any way by us if Christ has objectively satisfied the law on our behalf.
- Finally, the objectivity of Christ's atonement induces us to praise our Savior. Nothing is left for us to do but, by faith, raise open hands to accept the gift of our Savior's sacrifice. He willingly, personally, and lovingly accepted the cross on our behalf; "Christ's suffering and death were not his 'lot' but his deed." Who can't help but worship a groom that saves His bride in such a way?

In closing, read through this song by Augustus Toplady. I think it does a great job capturing the biblical understanding of the atonement:

Now Why This Fear?

From whence this fear and unbelief?
Hath not the Father put to grief
His spotless Son for me?
And will the righteous Judge of men
Condemn me for that debt of sin
Which, Lord, was charged on Thee?

Complete atonement Thou hast made,
And to the utmost Thou hast paid
Whate'er Thy people owed;
How then can wrath on me take place,
If sheltered in Thy righteousness,
And sprinkled with Thy blood?

If thou hast my discharge procured,
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine;
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

Turn then, my soul, unto thy rest!
The merits of thy great High Priest
Have bought thy liberty;
Trust in His efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee.

<https://founders.org/2015/04/16/the-objectivity-of-christs-atonement/>

From Whence This Fear And Unbelief?

Packer comments that this text...

...mirrors most strikingly in devotional response the particularistic efficacy, i.e., the genuinely substitutionary character of Christ's atoning death. This hymn, as Toplady wrote it (verbal smoothings in modern printings sometimes smudge the theology), brilliantly focuses the Reformed recognition of what Jesus and the apostolic writers meant by saying that the death at Calvary was 'for' people.

The hymn appears to have been written following a time of trial in Augustus Toplady's life. Strong Calvinist and all as our author was he, nevertheless, like every true saint of God, experienced those times in his life when his knees grew feeble and his arms weak.

When Pilgrim had been shown around the House of Interpreter and had been asked what he thought of the wonders and mysteries of the Christian life that had been shown to him, his reply was that they both filled him "with hope and fear."

And the words of this great hymn reflect one such time in the life of its author, when he was filled with fear. But, and this is the glory of it all, the words also expound the source of "hope" that is eternally set forth to rescue the believer from all his times of "fear and unbelief"

From whence this fear and unbelief,
Since God my Father, put to grief
His spotless Son for me?
Can he, the righteous judge of men,
Condemn me for that debt of sin,
Which, Lord, was charged on Thee?

Note how our author rides out to challenge that great two-headed dragon – "Fear and Unbelief" – that has come out and partly robbed him of his spiritual well-being. He lifts up the blood-stained cross of his Saviour before the enemy's glowing eyes so that it is forced to shrink back and retire into its lair again. "Who is he that condemneth?" Toplady is shouting out this first verse, "it is Christ that dies." And this is the source of victory over all our anxious thoughts and unbelieving hearts, that "God spared not his own son, but delivers him up for us all." See how Toplady places himself within the Courts of God's Justice.

The sentence has been written clearly above his head – "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But a "surety" steps into that place of condemnation – even God's own Son – and he takes the full brunt of that sentence for him. Why should he then fear or be unbelieving? The "Judge" who sits upon the seat of judgement in that Courtroom is "the Righteous Judge" and if He has accepted the payment of the "debt" by the surety on the condemned's behalf, then the condemned will never be condemned for that "debt of sin, which, Lord, was charged on Thee."

Not even a little? The old dragon of fear and unbelief may often suggest as a parting shot; will you not be condemned even a little? But Toplady lifts the Cross to its fullest height as he starts in upon his second verse to show, indeed, that "there is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

Complete atonement Thou hast made,
And to the utmost farthing paid,
Whate'er Thy people owed;
How, then, can wrath on me take place,
If sheltered in Thy righteousness,
And sprinkled with Thy blood.

Some would call this "high" doctrine, and, indeed it is – high as heaven itself – for it's Christ's atonement for the sins of His people that we are called to sing

about here. One of the accusations that fell at the feet of the disciples after our Lord had expounded the nature of His sufferings and death to them was that "they understood none of these things." And it is still an indictment writ large across the Church's character today that she has still, to a great extent failed to appreciate and preach the true nature of Christ's wondrous atonement. "Jesus who loved the church," says Paul, "and gave himself for it." "Thou shalt call his name Jesus," says the evangelist, "for he shall save his people from their sins." "The Son of Man is come to give his life a ransom for many," it says in another place. The old Calvinist, Toplady, might have called this "Limited Atonement" – that Christ's atonement was on behalf of His Church, His Bride, His People, His Sheep, His Elect, and for none else. And yet, here is the great and glorious paradox: that this so-called **Limited** atonement is the only "**Complete** atonement" that there is. Jesus has really paid the debt of His people's sins – "to the utmost farthing," says our author. "Charge it to mine account," says our blessed Saviour to His father in heaven who is seated upon His throne of judgement, "I will repay it." And He did – **really** did!

But, believer, do you **really** believe that Christ cancelled the debt of sin when He poured out His life an offering on the Cross? Whose debt, then? The debt of all the world, indiscriminately, say some. Ah then, my evangelical friend, if you believe that you are really a universalist after all, for you believe that all men have had their sins accounted for and the debt atoned for. But, it was "whate'er **Thy people** owed," says Toplady aright. And it was because Jesus paid every "farthing" of His people's debt when He made atonement for them on the Cross that that "limited" atonement is, indeed, and in truth the only "**Complete** atonement" that there is.

Let the glorious weight of our next verse anchor this mighty truth in your heart, believer.

If Thou hast my discharge procured,
And freely in my place endured
The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God will not **twice** demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then **again** at mine.

"The wages of sin is death," thunders the Word of God; "The wicked shall be turned into hell," it says. Now, visualise this sight, my friend: here is a sinner in hell, **and yet**, some would tell us, Christ really paid the debt for his sin! "Aha," says the devil, "what a prize I have here; Christ suffered hell for this sinner, but now this sinner must suffer hell all over again for himself." "Aha," he says again, "Christ paid the price of this one's sin to ransom him from this dark abyss, but

Christ hasn't received what He purchased with His blood." "Aha," he cries a third time, "the Father - the Judge of all the earth who is always suppose to do right – laid this sinner's iniquity upon His Son and his Son "bore his grief and carried his sorrow," but now the sinner will have to bear it all over again – I have robbed heaven of its purchase!" Ah, my friends, if your gospel of redemption leaves such room for such a possibility – that the ransomed and redeemed for whom Jesus shed His blood might indeed be lost at the last, then you have much room for "Fear and unbelief." But banish the thought with this blest truth

Payment God will not twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then **again** at mine.

Now may we sing the last verse with Augustus Toplady, and sing of "The merits of our great High Priest" really believing that those merits have purchased all needed grace to reconcile the banished from God back into His favour again. And what Christ has died for can never be lost, but, must be saved, and cannot run the hazard of ever suffering what He once and for all suffered for them:

Turn, then, my soul, unto thy rest:
The merits of thy Great High Priest
Speak peace and liberty:
Trust in His efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee.

https://www.wicketgate.co.uk/issue73/e73_3.html

Edited Excerpts from “Preservation of the Saints” (Ligonier)
by Alistair Begg

Does “once saved” mean “always saved”? For some, doubts about salvation can lead to a shaky faith, while others use the doctrine of eternal security as a license for spiritual carelessness. Against such extremes, Alistair Begg examines the Bible’s teaching on the “preservation of the saints”—the belief that once someone has been saved, God enables him or her to persevere in faith. Scripture’s warnings, he reminds us, should be taken seriously, even as its assurances lead us to lives of greater devotion and trust in Christ alone.

When John Bunyan closes *Pilgrim’s Progress*, he does so with a staggering statement: “Then I saw that there was a way to hell, even from the gate of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction.”

I have been involved in the affairs of church life now for essentially all of my life, having known the benefit and blessing of a Christian upbringing.

And therefore, there have been many, many people, and continue to be, who have marked and stamped my life for good and who have walked before me, marking out a path that I might follow. In the vast majority of cases, I have followed their progress with the greatest of joy and continue—in some respect, at least—to model my own life after theirs.

The greatest sadness for me in relationship to all of that is to know the names today of some who once preached the Bible to me, others who explained it for me, others who walked before me, and yet who today are not involved in the affairs of the church, do not follow hard after Christ—indeed, if addressed, would deny the very professions of faith which they had made in their earlier days—and they have wandered from the way. They have essentially taken the pathway of Pliable in *Pilgrim's Progress*, who in finding himself along with Pilgrim in the Slough of Despond entered into an altercation with Pilgrim, asking him, “Is this the kind of thing that you expected when we set out from the City of Destruction?” And without essentially waiting for Faithful or for Pilgrim to give him much of a response, he determines that he will out of the Slough of Despond, and Bunyan tells us he gets out of the Slough at the side closest to his home, and he went back and was heard from no more. The fact is that in the course of each of our lives, if we are honest, we have witnessed the sorry spectacle of those who once walked the path and who yet have not continued.

In the course of our Sunday-by-Sunday exposition back in Cleveland, we're studying together at the moment the book of Hebrews. And in the opening six chapters, which is as far as we have gone, I've been forcibly struck by the recurring emphasis which the writer makes on the absolute necessity of persevering, of staying the course, of keeping on track

In Hebrews 2:1, the writer says, “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” “So that we do not drift away.” And he is moving through these opening chapters to the conclusion of chapter 3 and to three great staggering questions in verse 16: “Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?” And he is recording there one of the saddest and sorriest lines and lines of tombstones that is ever recorded in Scripture...some six hundred thousand of them who never made it into the promised land, despite a quite glorious beginning.

Now, if you note and allow your eye to scan back up to 3:12, he says, “[I want you to] see to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”

In verse 14 he says, “[You know,] we have come to share in Christ,” and then notice the little two-letter word that is so important in a game of Scrabble if it lands on the right square, and it is vitally important here: “We have come to share in Christ *if* we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.” Indeed, he says the same thing in verse 6: “But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are [God’s] house, *if* we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.” You go on into 4:1: “Let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short” of the rest which God has promised to us. Verse 11 of chapter 4: “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”

Now, loved ones, I start here because I want to be very, very clear for myself and for you too. My understanding of the Bible is such that I believe that the doctrine of the preservation of the saints, or the perseverance of the saints, does not in any way make a fiction of these warnings in the book of Hebrews. These are real warnings for real people who have made professions and stepped out on the path. Indeed, quoting from Sinclair Ferguson in his book [*Know Your Christian Life*], from which I’ve derived as much help as any single book on the Christian life, he says, “The New Testament warns us by precept and example that some professing Christians may not persevere in their profession of Christ to the end of their lives.”

So the issue, then, is not just a matter of theological precision. It is definitely a matter of theological importance, but it is a matter of deep personal concern. It was to the apostle Paul, who on one occasion, and recorded in 1 Corinthians 9, says, “I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” And the great skill in pastoral care in relationship to these things must surely be to know when to emphasize the warnings and when to come and administer the promises. And the book of Hebrews is full both of promises and warnings. Every pastor understands this.

Many of the people who approach me with questions starting off with “don’t you believe the Bible teaches once saved always saved” are individuals who are marked by a kind of smug complacency and a groundless optimism which has little if anything at all to do with a doctrine of salvation which begins in the eternal councils of God and therefore will bring to the end those in whose lives he has begun a good work. And therefore, it is imperative for us that we make sure that when we are thinking about the preservation of the saints, that an experiential grasp of this biblical doctrine is not something which ushers us into a life of carelessness and false bravado, but it is something which ushers us into a life of deep carefulness.

And I would suggest that those who have been embraced by it and are learning to live in the light of it will be those who are taking *most* care to the very warnings that are conveyed in the book of Hebrews.

We need somehow or another to define our terms. And so let me do that. Indeed, let's allow Berkhof to do that...Berkhof says perseverance is "that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer, by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart, is continued and brought to completion." Strictly speaking—and when you read theology, you discover this—we're talking about the perseverance of God. It is on account of the fact that God perseveres in his love towards his own that we are enabled to persevere in our love towards him. It is not some mustering up of frenetic activity on the part of the well-meaning professor, but it is rather that we have been laid hold of by his great and powerful hand. The fundamental issue is not "the perseverance of the saints" but "the preservation of the saints" in order to emphasize the activity of God, so that we might know that it is he who preserves, it is he who keeps, and it is he who guards us.

It is on account of the fact that God perseveres in his love towards his own that we are enabled to persevere in our love towards him.

Now, there are so many places in the Scriptures where this unfolds for us in the most helpful of ways. Let me turn with you for a moment to 1 Peter and to the opening verses there and simply underscore this essential truth. Having supplied the definition, let us look to the Scriptures and see the way in which it unfolds in the plain and obvious meaning of the text. First Peter 1:3: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of ... Christ from the dead." Peter writes to the scattered believers of his day to encourage them. Right out of the chute, in his opening words he tells them, "You have been chosen by God the Father, you are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and you are sprinkled with the blood of Christ," ...three facts which are true of every genuine Christian. And then, as he proceeds from there to work it out, he tells them, "Isn't this a wonderful thing, that on account of God's mercy towards you, he has brought you out of the realm of hopelessness? You have been born anew to a living hope."

If there is one thing that marks the Christian believer in a world of hopelessness, it is surely this. And in what does it have its foundation? Not in the fact that the weather is lovely today, not in the fact that we live in the best of places, nor that all is well in business and in home, because the fact is, if we were to take time with one another and pursue many of those things, many of us carry heavy burdens and walk with heavy hearts.

But the amazing truth is that God in his mercy has done something within us that has brought us out of that realm and into a new realm.

If you go to see the long movie version of *Hamlet*, you will be struck again by the things that you were forced to learn as a schoolboy or schoolgirl. And there are some wonderful moments in it. But I was struck again by the king as he sidles up to Hamlet. And of course, he wants Hamlet to come around from his discomfiture at the death of his father and all of the badness that is in that. And as he sidles up to Hamlet, he says, "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?" And Hamlet walks out from there and begins that great soliloquy: "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this [life]." That is a great introduction to the picture of modern man.... "For it is weary, and it is stale, and it is flat, and it is unprofitable." And into all of that unprofitable flatness, the grace of God has come and born us again to "a living hope" by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. "The work which his goodness began..."

Secondly, you will notice that in accord with this, in verse 4, he has granted us "an inheritance." This inheritance "can never perish" or "spoil" or "fade." It's got your name on it.

Dear ones, in the life of everyone who has been born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, he has an inheritance, and it has your name upon it, and it awaits you. And it cannot be touched by death, and it cannot be stained by evil, and it cannot be impaired by time. That's what he's saying.

Thirdly, he says, "You're not only those who have been born again according to his great mercy and born into an inheritance which has your name on it reserved in heaven for you, but in the present, you are through faith shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." "Shielded by God's power." It's actually a military term which describes the guarding that was done by soldiers... That is exactly the picture which is used here. "You," he says, "dear believers, who have begun in the journey of faith, are looking forward to a day that is about to come. Yes, you have trials, and yet in these trials you may rejoice when you understand the wonder of what God has done." It is God's power which garrisons the believer. And it is in this that the child of God finds his security in the unending struggle of the soul.

Now, pay attention carefully to two words in verse 5. It doesn't say "kept in heaven for you who are shielded by God's power." It says "who *through faith* are shielded by God's power." It is a mistaken notion which regards the perseverance of the saints, or the preservation of the saints, as some kind of amazing insurance policy irrespective of the lives that we live. And you're sensible people, and you'll need to check it and make sure that this is the case.

The Bible makes clear that there is no preservation without faith, and at the same time it emphasizes that those who have faith are those who persevere. Indeed, back in Hebrews again, it was the very absence of faith on the part of the listeners which resulted in the fact that the word of God was of no value to them at all. And back now in Hebrews 4:2, he says, “For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.” We are preserved and we persevere through faith and never apart from faith. Now, that is not to say that we retain salvation on the basis of the persistence of our faith, but it is that we give evidence that we possess salvation by the continuation of our faith.

John Brown of Haddington puts it helpfully, all these years ago in the middle of the nineteenth-century, when in his super commentary on Hebrews he says, “The perseverance of the saints ... is their perseverance not only in a safe state, but in a holy course of disposition and conduct; and no saint behaving like a sinner can legitimately enjoy the comfort which the doctrine of perseverance is fitted and intended to communicate to every saint, acting like a saint.” That’s what I was mentioning earlier on. I was saying the people who want to know, “Once saved, always saved?” so often it seems to be a key to license in their minds: “Am I able just to do anything I want to do, and I can always hang back on this phrase?” The answer is no. That’s the same question as at the beginning of Romans 6: “Shall we continue in sin [then], that grace may abound?” Shall we manifest the wonder of God’s love by sinning so forcibly against him? Paul says, “That would be ridiculous. That would prove that you’ve never understood anything that I’ve said, from 3:21 all the way through the end of chapter 5.”

We give evidence that we possess salvation by the continuation of our faith.

Now, having said all of that, I do want to affirm, in case there’s any misunderstanding, that I do believe—and we share, I’m sure—the conviction that the Bible emphasizes the absolute certainty of the Christian’s preservation. And if you would be good enough to turn yet again, let’s just go for a moment to Romans chapter 8. For here in these triumphant verses Paul is making clear that there is nothing which can separate God’s children from his love. Verse 31: “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?” and so on. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

The love of Christ is the love of the Great Shepherd for his sheep (see John 10). What does the Good Shepherd do for his sheep?

He lays down his life for the sheep. And therefore, the love of God towards the sinner is a saving love. The love of the shepherd for his sheep is a love which saves. And again the Bible, the New Testament, is very clear that no man or woman may suppose that this love has embraced him unless he has come as a sinner to Christ and has declared with Thomas, "You are my Lord, and you are my God!"

Oh, the love that sought me!
Oh, the blood that bought me!
Oh, the grace that brought me to the fold,
Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold.

W. Spencer Walton, "In Tenderness He Sought Me" (1894)

And it is this love, he says, which holds and keeps and surrounds, and it is a love which God has displayed to us "while we were still sinners" Romans 5:8. It is the love of God which elects and which justifies and which glorifies, and God has done this. "I cannot tell," says the hymn writer,

Why he whom angels worship
Should set his love upon the sons of men,
Or why, as shepherd, he should seek the wanderers,
To bring them back, [I] know not how or when.

William Y. Fullerton, "I Cannot Tell" (1929)

This is an amazing thing. This is antithetical to that which produces smugness. This stops our mouths and humbles us before God. And leads us to magnify him.

"Who can bring any charge against God's elect, against those whom God has chosen?" He says, "It's God who justifies. Who wants to stand up and condemn you?" On what basis did God pass a justifying sentence in relationship to our lives? Not because we were righteous; because we were ungodly! We were sinful. We were liable for death on account of our sins. And while we were in that predicament, God passed a justifying sentence in relationship to us. Says the hymn writer,

Because the sinless Savior died
My [guilty] soul is counted free.
For God the just is satisfied
To look on him and pardon me.

Charitie L. Bancroft, "Before the Throne of God Above" (1863).

God knew the worst about you when he accepted you for the sake of his Son, and the verdict which he passed upon you was final. As Packer says, no one then “can produce new evidence of your depravity that will make [him] change His mind.” I love that verse: “When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within,” what do you do then? “Upward I look and see him there who made an end [to] all my sin.”

And so it is that for those who are not sufficiently aware of sin, these warnings need to be sounded out loud and clear, lest we are proceeding with a false optimism in relationship to our profession. But for those who do not know enough of pardon, the promises of the Word of God need to be offered as a balm for our souls.

I don’t know about you, dear ones, but the best that I can do in relationship to these things—and I already allude to it by my very approach—is to find a good hymnbook and take it with me. It’s not necessarily very easy to find a good hymnbook, but when you find one it’ll usually be an old one. Take it away, and get to the section that you’re in, in your own spiritual pilgrimage. You may find yourself weary and flattened out and discouraged and impoverished. Perhaps you’ve been living in the south side of your house in Romans chapter 7, and you’re acutely aware of your own particular wretchedness, and the Evil One has been accusing you fiercely, and things that you had hoped for are unfulfilled dreams, and expectations in ministry have not gone as you had hoped they might. And the whole weight and burden of it crushes in upon you.

Well then, you need to go to the Toplady section in your hymnbook, don’t you? And you better say it out loud in your car or sing it. Do park the car first, probably. And then give yourself a solid dose of Augustus M. Toplady:

From whence this fear and unbelief?
Hath not the Father put to grief
His spotless Son for me?
And will the righteous Judge of men
Condemn me for that debt of sin
Which, Lord, was charged on thee?

Complete atonement thou hast made,
And to the utmost farthing paid
Whate’er thy people owed:
Nor can his wrath on me take place,
If shelter’d in thy righteousness
And sprinkled with thy blood?

If thou hast my discharge procured,
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

Augustus M. Toplady, "From Whence This Fear and Unbelief?" (1777)

And that truth underpinning the mighty apostle allows him to say in Romans 8 verse 38—and with this we move to a conclusion, for I see that some of you are not persevering just as well as you had hoped—"For I am convinced that neither death nor life..." and so on. In other words, this stands in striking contrast to the fears which can grip the heart of the believer.

To what, then, are we to look? Well, surely, we must look away from ourselves. For to look inward will only give to us, many times, the grounds of discouragement. And that, loved ones, is why it is such facile nonsense to be continually trying to deal with the predicaments of our lives by bolstering up our self-esteem and finding out how good we really are: "Oh no, come on now, you're a fantastic fellow. Come on now, you're super." Say, "If you knew my heart, you'd know how wretched I really am." So, where are we going to look? To whom shall we look?

For those who do not know enough of pardon, the promises of the Word of God need to be offered as a balm for our souls.

Well, there is only one to whom we look, and that is to the Lord Jesus himself. And I want to conclude here in the book of Hebrews again. Hebrews chapter 3, he says to them, "Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess." He is the "great high priest"; he has "gone through the heavens." And you can read about that towards the end of chapter 4. Those who are persevering in the faith, those who are aware of the preservation of God within their lives, will be those who are continually and increasingly looking to the Lord Jesus Christ. So, to what shall we look? Where shall we look? Look to him.

To what, then, shall we listen? We will listen to his Word. Again, in Hebrews 3: "As the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.'" God's word speaks to us through the mouth of Jesus in John 10... "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; [and] no one can snatch them out of my hand."

It is his Word which warns me. It is his Word which guides and teaches and encourages me. And it is imperative, then, that I become a child of the Word. And incidentally, when people come to me and say, “Do you believe, Pastor, that the Holy Spirit has something to say to the church today?” I always tell them, “Yes, I do believe that. And it is right here.” “No, no,” they say, “I mean something today, you know, up to the minute, a sort of red-letter edition.” “Yes,” I said, “I understood you. It is right here. It is here. ‘The Holy Spirit says: “Today...” It is a sufficient Word for all of our dilemmas. Let us then look to the Word.

But if you think about looking to the Word and listening to the Word, when you think of the denial of Peter, as he trembles on the very brink of his experience, on the very brink of capitulation, and as he turns and responds to the servant girl, and he says, “No, I never knew the man,” and with oaths and curses he denies his Lord and Master—he, the master of the brave word! “Even though everybody falls away,” Peter said, “even though everyone denies you, I’ll never deny you, Jesus.” And what was it that brought him to his senses? What was it that struck like a knife into his heart? It was the word that he remembered. It says in the Gospel of Luke 22:61, “[And] then [he] remembered the word [that] the Lord had spoken.” And in remembering the word of God that had been spoken to him, it probably brought back to his mind the further word of Jesus: “Simon, I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.” And on the strength of the word, he persevered.

To whom shall I look? I shall look to Christ. To what shall I listen? I shall listen to his Word alone. And I will, thirdly and finally, make sure that I am organically involved in the company of God’s people. Hebrews 3:13 not only encourages us to fix our thoughts on Jesus and to guard our hearts but, in verse 13, to “encourage one another daily, as long as it[’s] called Today.” Why? “So that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”

If you go get *Pilgrim’s Progress* and read it again, you’ll find that he outlines in there the way in which declension comes in the life of the professor, and how the hardening of the spiritual arteries ensues. And very early on within it, there is a distancing of oneself internally from an in-touch relationship with Christ. There is an increased disinterest in the things of Scripture. There may be a listening with the ears, but there is no longer a listening with the heart. There is a dabbling with sin in the private place, and there is a removal from the influence of those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ, who know us best and who love and care for us. “See to it that you don’t have an unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God, and as an antidote to that, make sure that you are encouraging one another daily, lest you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Our faith will not fail, because it is God who sustains it. I think it was Jim Packer again who said—and I love this—“You are not strong enough to fall away while God is resolved to hold you.”

Let me finish with these verses of Toplady in “A Debtor to Mercy Alone”...

A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
My person and offering to bring.
The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.

The work which his goodness began,
The arm of his strength will complete;
His promise is Yea and Amen,
And never was forfeited yet.
Things future, nor things that are now,
Nor all things below or above,
Can make him his purpose forgo,
Or sever my soul from his love.

My name from the palms of his hands
Eternity will not erase;
Impressed on his heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace.
Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heav'n.

Augustus M. Toplady, “A Debtor to Mercy Alone” (1771)