

The Sabbath Watchman

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2012



General Conference
World Assembly 2012

Changes ...

"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." Ecclesiastes 1:9.

As a new administration takes the reins of management after the 2012 General Conference World Assembly in South Africa, there is a shuffling of responsibilities in some cases and new individuals coming on board in others. Some things will remain unchanged.

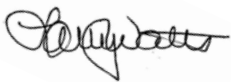
But the challenge is to meet the holy ideal—which is also found in the book of Ecclesiastes—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (9:10), because the day will come when our opportunities to do our best will end. But today we can still heed the holy counsel, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened." 1 Corinthians 5:7. Let everything be done with love and joy. We want to do this by the grace of God and the movings of His Spirit.

In this issue of *The Sabbath Watchman*, we pick up something old, for this publication dates back to 1925 in the United States. But there is also something new—not just a report of the just completed World Assembly but also a new design for this official publication of the International Missionary Society with the commitment to uphold its mission to be a "beacon of hope, faith, and truth in a confused world."

Three spiritual articles in this issue focus on the solid foundation the church has been given, while acknowledging that human strength is weakness and is not to be trusted. Rather, every person will be able to perform the ministry he or she has accepted only through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit—"which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Colossians 1:27, 28.

It is our desire that the changes will be a blessing to the body of Christ and take place solely through His providential working. Truly, "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God: Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever." Psalm 146:6, 7.

In His service,



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The Sabbath Watchman

Vol. 87, No. 3

Beacon of hope, faith, and truth in a confused world.

We believe:

- The all-wise, loving God created all things in the universe by His Son, Jesus Christ; He is its Owner and Sustainer.
- He met the challenge to His loving leadership and authority by reconciling the world to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, the Word made flesh.
- The Holy Spirit, Jesus' representative on earth, convicts of sin, guides into truth, and, when abiding in man, overcomes all unrighteousness.
- The Bible is the record of God's dealings with mankind and the standard of all doctrine; the Ten Commandments are the transcript of His character and the foundation of all enduring reform.
- His people, in harmony with God's Word and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, call all men everywhere to be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus.
- Bible prophecy reveals that earth's history will soon close with the visible return of Jesus Christ as King to claim all who have accepted Him as the world's only Redeemer and their Lord.

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Public Meetings Summary

Potchefstroom, South Africa

July 11-14, 2012

"Surely I come quickly." Revelation 22:20

For the first time in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Reform Movement, the General Conference World Assembly was held on the continent of Africa. After the delegates' sessions, which took place in Johannesburg from June 24 to July 11, 2012, the public conference was held at North West University in the small town of Potchefstroom, a two-hour drive from Johannesburg, from July 11 to 14, 2012.

Wednesday, July 11

After the conference was opened and the attendees were welcomed by **Elder Emmanuel Chil-eshe**, President of the South African Union, **Elder Henry Dering (USA)** presented a study on the current signs of the end of the world.

The year 2012 has been the focus of theories about the end of the world. If one does a Google search for "End of the World 2012," he gets more than 1,560,000,000 hits. Many have predicted the

end of the world. Satan is creating many deceptions and will even impersonate Christ. The Bible, however, will enlighten us to the truth. It tells of the deceptions and the natural disasters which are on the increase, and we see this happening today. The Bible also states that Jesus will come when the world does not expect it. He will come as a thief to most people.

The three angels' messages are the gospel to the world today. They are positive messages, not of doom, but of hope. They are about getting right with God.

Thursday, July 12

Elder Anton Salavyov (Australia) began the day with the encouragement not only to be conscious of the time in which we live but, more importantly, to fulfill the conditions needed to be prepared for the Lord's coming.

He compared today to the time of ancient Israel. It was not God's will that they wander

Above, in the meeting hall at North West University

in the wilderness for forty years; however, due to their fear and unbelief, they were required to do so. Prior to the conquest of Canaan, Joshua had gone apart to pray and worship, asking for help, and he had an encounter with Christ. For us to be able to conquer spiritually, we also need to have an encounter with Jesus. We can believe all the doctrines; but if we do not know Jesus, we will fail.

Elder Tzvetan Petkov (USA) presented the next subject. Most of us want Jesus to come and put an end to all the suffering and pain in this life so we can enter into eternal life. But what was the reaction of the people to Jesus' first coming? "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Matthew 2:1-3. Instead of rejoicing, the record is that they were troubled. Ask yourself—do you really want Jesus to come today, or does the idea of Jesus' coming trouble you?

The problem was that they expected a different Jesus—a powerful revolutionary, or at least someone born in the house of the high priest or the king. When Jesus came, they did not recognize Him, for He came from the poorest area of Judea.

This did not happen only in the Jewish nation; it is the same today. Churches are preaching Jesus Christ, but it is not the Jesus of the Bible. Those of this class are described by the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:22: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?" Matthew 7:22. Even in God's church there is the danger that we do not accept the Jesus of the Bible but put our own conditions and expectations ahead of His requirements.

We need to accept His sacrifice and permit Him to enter our lives, otherwise we will be like the Jews. Jesus will come, and we will not recognize Him. And He will not recognize us. We need to experience the miracle of accepting Jesus Christ.

Elder Larry Watts (USA) continued by speaking on the important subject of "Saved to Serve." It is not so important what God does with me; that is His business. What is important is what I do with God; that is my business. If God wanted us in heaven right now, He could bring a fiery chariot as we walk out of the building today and take us to heaven as He did with Elijah. However, there is needful preparation. Paul encouraged us to "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" 2 Corinthians 13:5.

In Jesus Christ is the certainty of salvation. If we have Jesus, we have everything. That right-

*Below, General
Conference
delegates from
85 countries*



teousness that brings peace is not of us. Was Jesus in need of salvation? No, He is the Saviour. He came to serve. He brought mankind salvation, and now we have been “saved to serve.”

Brother Parmenas Shirima (Tanzania) explained that we need to be ready for the Lord’s coming now, because it has been delayed due to our lack of faith. We are living in a terrible world that is full of sin and has been taken captive by the devil, but we still need to have patience and the faith of Jesus. Revelation 14:12.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” Philippians 2:5-6. We need to have the mind of Jesus. His joy was to come and save us. He took the form of a servant/slave. He came to this enslaved world and took our nature—human nature—with all its conditions, except without sin. Now, Paul says, we need to have the same mind. Regardless of your position in the world, take the mind of Jesus, and you will be ready to meet Him with joy.

Elder Joel Barnedo (USA) was the next speaker. The apostle Paul was a happy missionary. He was stoned and imprisoned, yet he sang in prison. Before that, on the resurrection day, Jesus did not talk about the crucifixion; rather He spoke about peace as He walked to Emmaus with the two disciples.

Jesus is coming. Let us not talk about the persecution. Let us sing. Jesus is coming soon. It is easier for God to take people to heaven than for Him to put heaven into people’s hearts.

If we focus on negative things, we will get negative results. If you came here to focus on the sermon and the beauty of the gospel, you will go home happy. You will start to do missionary work. We are not here to preach to you; we are here to motivate you—so you will enjoy canvassing. Then when you go back to your church, you will go to church early. You will help the pastor with missionary work. This will be the fruit of this conference. Those who do missionary work are the happiest people on earth.

Elder Henry Andrade (Australia) read Galatians 4:4: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son.” He outlined prophecies that are important to the Adventist



Above, delegates from Europe with Elders Hunger, Suarez, and Francis

people, as recorded in the book of Revelation. He began with the seven trumpets and went through the history of the Advent message as recorded in Revelation 14:6, 7. God’s time schedule never fails. On October 22, 1844, the people were waiting for the coming of Jesus, but He did not come. It was a great disappointment for many. Brother Andrade reviewed events that will occur from now to the coming of Jesus and beyond the millennium.

God loves the sinner and wants everyone to be saved, but the sinner has to change. This is the only way he can be saved. No one knows the date or the hour, but we can see that the time is very close.

Below, delegates from Asia with Elders Barnedo, Hunger, Suarez, and Francis





Above, delegates from Africa with Elders Hunger, Suarez, Francis, and Shirima

Elder Danilo Monterroso (Guatemala) shared with us some of the signs of the times that have occurred. Some of the physical signs have taken place (the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light, and the stars falling from heaven). Other signs, such as distress in society all around the world, social problems, family problems, political problems, problems in the church, men's hearts failing them for fear, social crisis, and economic crisis, all point to the fact that Jesus is coming soon.

Below, delegates from Latin America with Elders Hunger, Suarez, and Francis

Is the church ready to say, "Come, Lord Jesus?" Are you ready? Do you remember what happened with two and a half tribes in the time of Moses? They said, We don't want to enter the Promised Land. We want to stay on this side. How many today don't want to taste the fruit



of Canaan? How many are living comfortably and not preparing for Jesus coming?

Christ has not yet come, but almost all of the signs have been fulfilled. What is He waiting for? He is waiting for you and me to reflect the character of Christ; and when we reflect His image, He will come. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8.

Elder Alfred Ngwenya (Ethiopia) spoke the glorious words, "Maranatha! Christ is coming. I want to see Jesus Christ appearing. There is no joy in this world. Today, if Christ is in you, you will be a happy man, a happy woman. The coming of Jesus will be fruitful for you."

Brother Ngwenya went on to explain how several barren women in the Bible produced champions of truth. Something that could not produce became productive; something fruitful came from these barren women. There is Sarah (Isaac's mother), Hannah (Samuel's mother), the wife of Manoah (Samson's mother), and Elizabeth (John the Baptist's mother). Finally, the mighty preacher, Jesus Christ, came from a virgin woman. Barren women produced generals.

If you have been unfruitful, come to Jesus; He can make you fruitful. He is waiting for you.

Friday, July 13

Elder Vangarral Chengbe (Sierra Leone) spoke about Abraham, who was told by God to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. Genesis 22:2.

Abraham obeyed, leaving very early in the morning without telling his wife. An appeal was made for everyone present to sacrifice his best for the Lord—his talents, his time, and his means. If one can sing, he can glorify God through song. God has blessed each of us with a variety of talents so we can honor and glory Him. Give your best sacrifice for God.

Brother Stefano La Corte (Italy) was selected by the General Conference delegates to oversee the Good Samaritan Department. He presented a summary of the work of the Good Samaritan Department for the twenty years that it has operated.

Sister Santina Mascera sacrificed many years of her life for this department, and she remains its honorary president. From its headquarters

in Casalguidi, Italy, it has supported projects all over the world from Africa to Central and South America, Asia, Oceania, and Eastern Europe. Funds are collected from contributors in the church and also from the public.

In Italy, booths have been set up during festivals, and people walk by and donate. May God put it in our hearts to help support the Good Samaritan Fund as we are able.

Elder Francesco Caputo (Italy) told about a little four-year-old boy who was very hungry. He was with some other children on the street and was looking for a piece of bread. He knocked on a door, and a well-dressed man opened the door. He asked, "What do you want?"

The boy said, "I am really hungry. I just want a piece of bread."

The man went into the house, came back with a piece of bread, and gave it to the little boy. The child took the bread and thanked the man. Then the man started to talk with him, "Little one, do you know that you have a Father in heaven, and that He loves everyone and He loves you, too, very much?"

The little boy was listening carefully, "So, sir, we all have a Father in heaven? And so my father is your father?"

The man said, "Yes, of course."

"So, then, if we have the same father, you are my brother. And you, my brother, are not ashamed to give me this hard piece of bread when you are my brother?" The man was a pastor, and he gave the little boy just an old stale piece of bread.

Religion is not passive. It is not saying, "No, no, no, don't..." or doing nothing. The love of Christ is action. True joy will be found when you do good things. True happiness is not limited to "don't," although sometimes the Lord starts us off this way.

May God help us to allow the living water to flow through us. The sweetest words a person will ever hear are: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Matthew 25:40. He doesn't want to lose anyone. He wants us to be with Him in heaven. The greatest sin is to reject salvation. Don't do it. God loves you, and through you He wants to love others.



Elder Martin Lagunas (Mexico) spoke the resounding words of Scripture, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." Amos 4:12. The coming of the Lord is at the door. Do you believe it? Ask yourself if you are in the process of being ready for heaven, or if you are in harmony with the world. The church needs to be pure. Many who profess to be Christians dress, eat, and behave like the world. The only possible way to find out who they are is to hear what they say. Grace is coming to an end, and we need to have the attitude of Zaccheus. He made up his mind to go and see Jesus; he even overcame obstacles by climbing a tree. We also need to remove obstacles.

Our actions need to be in harmony with our faith, and our faith needs to be in God. Our hearts are either with God or with the world. If we wish

Above, delegates from Oceania (Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific islands) with Elders Hunger, Suarez, and Francis

Below, delegates from North America with General Conference officers



to see Jesus and be with Him for eternity, we need to ask Him to sanctify us in Christ today.

Brother Rolando de la Paz (Philippines) emphasized training for medical missionary work as very important for church members. This work sets suffering people free. Those who are helped are filled with gratitude, and then God works upon their hearts.

We all have different talents. Some have special abilities in medical lines, and others have talents in other areas; but every faculty should be used for God's glory. Before Jesus comes, we must be blameless through the indwelling Christ. When we understand the plan of salvation deeply, we will hate sin as did Jesus. Only through His grace are those who keep His commandments made free.

The Lord is appealing to all of us to humble our hearts before Him. Our great Redeemer lives; and because He lives, we will also live. To lose heaven is to lose everything. To win heaven is to win everything.

Sister Raquel Orce (USA) took us back in history to the time when the Passover was instituted in the nation of Israel, when the people were still in Egypt. Prior to their departure, the Lord instituted this celebration to help them remember the exodus from Egypt and look forward to the coming of the Messiah. This feast was a family event, to be celebrated as a Sabbath by

every family in Israel. Certain preparations had to be made for the feast. First, a lamb was carefully chosen. Then, all yeast was put out of the house. The house itself was cleaned thoroughly. And then the unleavened bread was eaten with bitter herbs.

When it came time to eat the lamb, they had to do so (1) with their loins girded; (2) with their shoes on; and (3) with their staffs in their hands. We no longer keep the Passover, however the three requirements are symbolic for us today. The loins represented the truth, the shoes symbolized the gospel, and the staff indicated faith.

They had their shoes on, because they needed to be ready to leave at any moment. This is the attitude that we should have. We should not have a home on earth where we think we will always be. We have a new home—a heavenly home—and we need to be ready to go there at any time. In accepting the gospel and the three angels' messages, the church members will have their loins girded and their staffs in their hands.

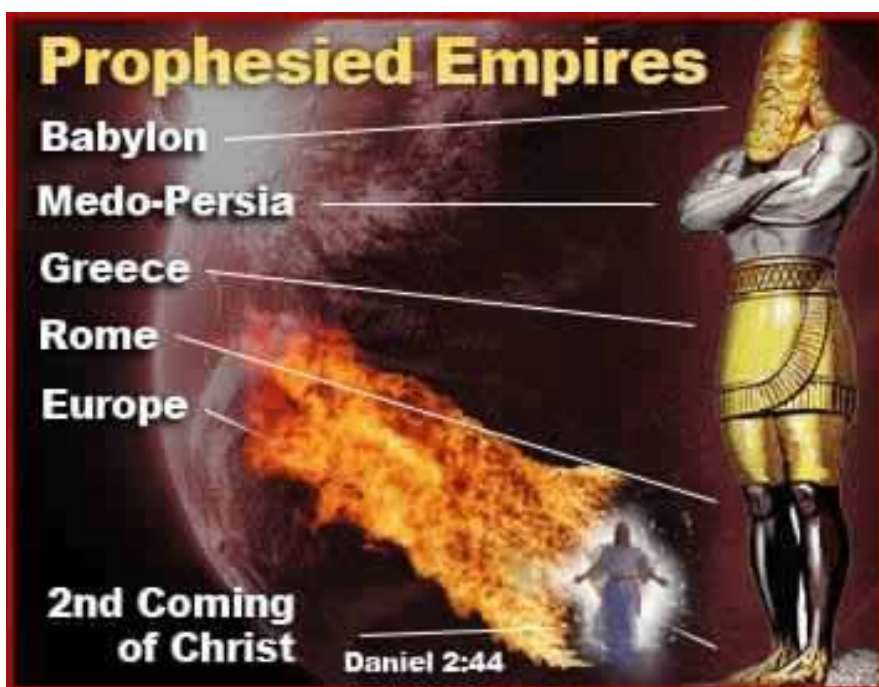
Elder Pablo Hunger (USA) said, "I am missing home. When you have been away for some time, it is always nice to return home. When I visit the brethren, they are all very friendly and kind; but still it is not like home."

Soon we are going to our heavenly home. In reality we are pilgrims here. In Hebrews 11 we read of many faithful souls who considered themselves pilgrims on this earth. Moses had great privileges in Egypt, but he refused this luxurious lifestyle, because he wanted something better. Jesus is coming soon, and He wants to take us to a better home to be enjoyed for all eternity. Everything will be in harmony there.

Enoch enjoyed communion with the Lord, and we need the same preparation as he had. When we desire this with all our hearts and put all our energy into the Lord's work, He will come and take us home.

In the beauty of the heavenly home there will be no more sickness, sorrow, or death. This should be our message. Humanity needs comfort. They need hope. We need to direct the people's thoughts to the heavenly home. How thankful we can be to the Lord for His love and pardon that made it possible for us to inherit that new home.

Below, a picture depicting the prophecy of Daniel 2, presented during the public conference



Sabbath, July 14

During the Sabbath school, **Elder Pablo Hunger** gave a missionary report of the new areas that have opened up for missionary work in the last five years. These countries include: Cuba, Haiti, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Senegal, Gambia, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Japan, Malaysia, and more. Let us support these new mission fields with our prayers and funds. We need to be united for this missionary expansion.

Elder Idel Suarez, Jr. (USA), presented the divine service using the conference theme as his title: "Surely I Come Quickly." Revelation 22:20. He shared evidence of Jesus' second coming and spoke about how we can hasten that glorious event.

Peter said that in the last days scoffers would arise. 2 Peter 3:3, 4. These people have heard that Jesus is coming since they were children, and now they are old and He still has not come. Noah preached for 120 years, and the Reform Movement is nearly 100 years old. It is 124 years since the fateful Adventist conference in Minneapolis in 1888.

Brother Suarez took us back in history to the city of Constantinople, which had been ruled by Christians for 1,000 years. Its founder was the emperor Constantine. The Anatolian Turks attacked this city using cannons, the Moslems came by land and sea, and the city fell. Like that city, our planet cannot endure much more. In Revelation it says that Jesus will come, riding a white horse; and then Babylon will fall.

Jesus said, "Surely I come." He will come in glory. He will be beautiful. Many famous scientists who were sincere have been led to acknowledge that God is the author of all true science. We need to open the books of Daniel and Revelation. Paul says that prophecy is to help unbelievers to believe the holy Word. Many do not know Jesus, and yet we have a personal letter for them signed by Him. We need to read it, live it, and share it.

If you want to be at the well of Christ, Jesus said, "I give you My coat of righteousness. I am your substitute. I am your guarantee."

The afternoon was devoted to special music and praise to the Lord of heaven and earth.

Elder Douglas Francis (Sri Lanka) quoted 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

What is this price which God paid? He emptied Himself. He emptied His pockets. He paid the price—the life of Jesus Christ. He paid the price for our redemption. He paid the ransom money, and now He wants what He purchased—our hearts. He wants us to keep His sacred commandments. He wants us to love Him. But some people ask a question. Does it pay to serve God? What do we gain from keeping the commandments? Read Malachi 3:13, 14.

When we encourage the believers to pay their tithes and offerings with love and faith, some start to make excuses; but, remember, He bought each of us with a very high price. How will you pay Him back? You need to be the best possible steward of your talents, including time, physical health, everyday life, and monetary blessings.

We are blessed with a wonderful truth. We are blessed to be in the Lord's church. We are blessed to be His children. He paid the price for our eternal life. Thus, it is natural for us to show our gratitude. Let our stewardship and our lives fulfill His will for His honor and glory.

All too quickly it came time for the final farewell meeting. All the **General Conference Committee members** came to the front to give a few closing words of thanksgiving and encouragement. We will be going back to our respective churches with the blessings we received from the conference and with new courage and zeal to push forward the work of the Lord.

Beautiful unity and fellowship were shared among the 900-plus people in attendance on the Sabbath. Brother Chileshe, the leader of the South African Union, closed the meeting with thanks and praise to the Lord.

—Wendy Eaton, Canada **SW**

Be the best possible steward of your talents.

General Conference Officers

2012-2017



Above, left to right, eleven of fourteen General Conference Committee members: Larry Watts, Raquel Orce (not a Committee member), Tzvetan Petkov, Anton Salavyov, Douglas Francis, Idel Suarez, Jr., Pablo Hunger, Francesco Caputo, Martin Lagunas, Rolando De La Paz, Danilo Monterroso, Parmenas Shirima

From June 24 to July 11, 116 delegates from around the world, including the first delegate ever from China, met in Johannesburg, South Africa, to decide on important issues facing God's church. Even though the daily schedule was grueling, time was set aside each day for prayer and worship. Each delegate knew that God's guidance was vital to every decision. His blessing and counsel were sought continually.

Electing new officers to lead the work for the next five years was an especially important task. The work at the General Conference is not easy. The hours are long, and the responsibilities are heavy.

After much prayer, the officers listed on the next page were nominated and accepted by the delegates in session. The various departments of the General Conference were grouped into three main ministries. While all departments have the common goal of sharing the gospel with the world, their work has been subdivided

according to the type of work for which they are responsible. The Missionary Ministry deals primarily with world evangelization efforts. The Health Ministry seeks to provide assistance for the temporal needs of suffering mankind. The Social Ministry works with specific groups within society, such as the family and youth.

Another change implemented during the World Assembly meetings was to upgrade Regions into Divisions. Giving Regional leaders their own secretaries and committees to act as extensions of the General Conference will free up the General Conference to develop support materials, programs, and training and permit greater freedom to advance and support the work in new areas. This follows the advice given in Exodus 18:26, "And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves."

Please support all of the officers with your prayers. **SW**

President: Idel Suarez, Jr. (USA)

Vice President/First Secretary: Pablo Hunger
(Austria)

Second Secretary: Woonsan Kang (South Korea)

Treasurer: Douglas Francis (Sri Lanka)

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President, Vice President/First Secretary,
Treasurer, Second Secretary, rotating members
from the Division Leaders (each of the five
leaders will serve one year as a member of the
Executive Committee)

GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

President, Vice President/First Secretary,
Treasurer, Second Secretary, Division Leaders,
Ministerial Department Director, Missionary
Ministry Director, Evangelism Leader, Health
Ministry Director, Education Leader

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Treasurer/Director: Douglas Francis (Sri
Lanka)

Other Members: Hans Rekker (Holland), John
Bescec (Canada)

Auditors: Timo Martin (Canada), Rachel
Austria (Philippines)

MINISTERIAL DEPARTMENT

(one member per continent)

North America (Director): Tzvetan Petkov
(Sweden/USA)

Asia: A. Cortez (Philippines)

Central America: Martin Lagunas (Mexico)

Europe: Antonino Di Franca (Italy)

South America: Alfonso Reto (Peru)

Africa: Parmenas Shirima (Tanzania/England)

Oceania: Henry Andrade (Australia)

MISSIONARY MINISTRY

Publishing Leader (Ministry Director): Larry
Watts (USA)

Evangelism Leader: Alfred Ngwenya
(Zimbabwe)

Multimedia Leader: Noe Chappa (Argentina)

Canvassing Leader: Raquel Orce (Spain)

HEALTH MINISTRY

Health Leader (Ministry Director): Roland de
la Paz (Philippines)

Engineer: Gerhard Köbele (Germany)

Good Samaritan Leader: Stefano La Corte
(Italy)

SOCIAL MINISTRY

Family Leader (Ministry Director): Raquel
Orce (Spain)

Youth Leader: Joel Barnedo (USA)

Education Leader: Danilo Monterroso
(Guatemala)

DIVISION LEADERS AND COMMITTEES

Oceania: Anton Salavyov (Australia)

Committee Members: Oceania
representative to serve as Secretary
(currently Henry Andrade, Australia),
Indonesian Field representative (currently
Jan Karinda, Indonesia)

Asia: Douglas Francis (Sri Lanka)

Committee Members: Two Philippine
representatives (currently Arnolfo Cortez,
Asian Field secretary, Philippines; Roland
De La Paz, Philippines)

Europe: Franco Caputo (Italy/Greece)

Committee Members: German
representative to serve as Secretary
(currently Daniel Serban, Germany),
Spanish Field representative (currently
Daniel Garcia, Spain), Hungarian
representative (currently Anton Tanucsev,
Hungary), Dutch Field representative
(currently Hans Rekker, Holland)

Africa: Parmenas Shirima (Tanzania)

Committee Members: Kenyan Union
representative to serve as Secretary
(currently Sevith Moyo, Kenya), Zimbabwe
Field representative (currently Alfred
Ngwenya, Zimbabwe), Tanzanian Union
representative (currently Bright Fue,
Tanzania), West African representative
(currently Lencha Tekle, Ghana)

Latin America: Martin Lagunas (Mexico)

Committee Members: Chilean Union
representative to serve as Secretary
(currently Alfredo Fisicaro), Peruvian
representative (currently Cristobal Lozada),
Brazilian representative (currently Adalicio
Fontes), Venezuelan representative
(currently Julian Guilarte)

"Presidents elected from Unions and Fields will form the
Division or Continental Committee. Or Unions and Fields
may choose the best person for the job...." These persons
will serve "until the next reorganization of the countries"
they represent. -GC Resolutions 1012-119, 179.

"He who yields
himself most
unreservedly to
the influence of
the Holy Spirit is
best qualified to do
acceptable service for
the Master." -*Pastoral
Ministry*, p. 152.

The “Ever New” Commandment

By Ellen G. White

... **W**e are to learn to answer the prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John. We are to make this prayer our first study.... My brethren and sisters, I ask you to heed these words and to bring to your study a calm, humble, contrite spirit, and the healthy energies of a mind under the control of God. Those who fail to learn the lessons contained in this prayer are in danger of making one-sided developments, which no future training will ever fully correct.

“Neither pray I for these alone,” Christ said, “but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.

“And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me.

“Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these

have known that Thou hast sent Me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” John 17:20-26.

It is the purpose of God that His children shall blend in unity.... Union brings strength; disunion, weakness. United with one another, working together in harmony for the salvation of men, we shall indeed be “laborers together with God.” Those who refuse to work in harmony greatly dishonor God....

Union with Christ and with one another is our only safety in these last days. Let us not make it possible for Satan to point to our church members, saying: “Behold how these people, standing under the banner of Christ, hate one another. We have nothing to fear from them while they spend more strength fighting one another than in warfare with my forces.”

After the descent of the Holy Spirit the disciples went forth to proclaim a risen Saviour, their one desire the salvation of souls. They rejoiced in the sweetness of the communion with saints. They were tender, thoughtful, self-denying, willing to make any sacrifice for the truth’s sake. In their daily association with one another they revealed the love that Christ had commanded them to reveal. By unselfish

words and deeds they strove to kindle this love in other hearts.

The believers were ever to cherish the love that filled the hearts of the apostles after the descent of the Holy Spirit. They were to go forward in willing obedience to the new commandment: "As I have loved you, that ye also love one another." John 13:34. So closely were they to be united to Christ that they would be enabled to fulfill His requirements. The power of a Saviour who could justify them by His righteousness was to be magnified.

But the early Christians began to look for defects in one another. Dwelling upon mistakes, giving place to unkind criticism, they lost sight of the Saviour and of the great love He had revealed for sinners. They became more strict in regard to outward ceremonies, more particular about the theory of the faith, more severe in their criticisms. In their zeal to condemn others they forgot their own errors. They forgot the lesson of brotherly love that Christ had taught. And, saddest of all, they were unconscious of their loss. They did not realize that happiness and joy were going out of their lives, and that soon they would walk in darkness, having shut the love of God out of their hearts.

The apostle John realized that brotherly love was waning in the church, and he dwelt particularly upon this point. Up to the day of his death he urged upon believers the constant exercise of love for one another. His letters to the churches are filled with this thought. "Beloved, let us love one another," he writes; "for love is of God.... God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.... Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." 1 John 4:7-11....

How close and tender should be the tie that binds us together. The people of the world are watching us to see if our faith is exerting a sanctifying influence upon our hearts. They are quick to discern every defect in our lives, every inconsistency in our actions. Let us give them no occasion to reproach our faith.

It is not the opposition of the world that endangers us the most; it is the evil cherished in the hearts of professed believers that works our most grievous disaster and most retards the

progress of God's cause. There is no surer way of weakening our spirituality than by being envious, suspicious of one another, full of faultfinding and evil surmising....

Harmony and union existing among men of varied dispositions is the strongest witness that can be borne that God has sent His Son into the world to save sinners. It is our privilege to bear this witness. But, in order to do this, we must place ourselves under Christ's command. Our characters must be molded in harmony with His character, our wills must be surrendered to His will. Then we shall work together without a thought of collision.

Little differences dwelt upon lead to actions that destroy Christian fellowship. Let us not allow the enemy thus to gain the advantage over us. Let us keep drawing nearer to God and to one another. Then we shall be as trees of righteousness, planted by the Lord, and watered by the river of life. And how fruitful we shall be! Did not Christ say: "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit"? John 15:8....

When Christ's prayer is fully believed, when its instruction is brought into the daily life of God's people, unity of action will be seen in our ranks. Brother will be bound to brother by the golden bonds of the love of Christ. The Spirit of God alone can bring about this oneness. He who sanctified Himself can sanctify His disciples. United with Him, they will be united with one another in the most holy faith. When we strive for this unity as God desires us to strive for it, it will come to us. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 239-243. **SW**

So closely were they to be united to Christ that they would be enabled to fulfill His requirements.





Present Truth

By Tzvetan Petkov

Introduction

Writing to all the believers who “have obtained ... precious faith ... through the righteousness of God,” the apostle Peter used an expression that since that time has had significant, frequent use. For the believers of his time and for those in the future he expressed the wish that everyone may be established in the “present truth”: “Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.” 2 Peter 1:12. What is “present truth”? What statements concerning it are made in the Spirit of prophecy?

The expression “present truth” is used by Sister Ellen G. White in the testimonies and was presented to her as something very important. Belief in the present truth is required of a person who wants to become a member of Christ’s body. Furthermore, belief in the present truth is inspired by the Spirit of God. And belief in the present truth is necessary to obtain salvation and eternal life. Therefore, the question is natural: “What does present truth mean? What is included in it?”

The term “present truth” is not difficult to understand. The word “present” added to the

word “truth” leaves no doubt that it has to do with the truth as it is revealed in and is applicable to the present time. Let us consider the testimony of Manuscript 56, written in 1899.

“Christ declares, ‘I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.’ If the cross does not find an influence in its favor, it creates an influence. Through generation succeeding generation, the truth for this time is revealed as present truth. Christ on the cross was the medium whereby mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each other. This is the means that is to move the world.” —(MS 56, 1899) *Lift Him Up*, p. 230.

The “present truth” for today

Every prophet in his time was called by the Lord to give and emphasize the message that God’s people most needed. It was the same with Sister White, for, according to the historical development of the church and the prophetic circumstances, she presented the truth given by God. This does not mean that every new generation will have a new kind of truth; but it does mean that the eternal, revealed truth, according to the historical context and situation, becomes more timely and has a specific focus. For example,

in times of wealth and a booming economy, the present truth will warn the believers of the danger of covetousness or love of money, the idolatry of wealth, and the lack of spirituality. Then again, in time of war, the present truth addresses the particular dangers of transgressing the commandments of God if one joins a nation's military forces. This does not mean that in times of peace the teaching concerning participation in politics and war changes, rather it becomes more timely and draws more attention.

An important factor affecting the present truth or the message to be emphasized at a particular time is the historical development and condition of the church. In 1844, after the disappointment, for example, the Lord sent messages to gather the scattered flock; in 1888, also according to the need of the moment, He gave the message of Christ Our Righteousness. And here is another example: At the time when Sister White was alive, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had not sanctioned participation in warfare. She was not informed about the development of the Reform Movement in this context. She did not know that the faithful Seventh-day Adventists were unjustly disfellowshipped, and she was not aware of all the consequences involved. Nevertheless, through the Spirit of prophecy given her by God, she saw a coming crisis and the urgent need of reformation.

Let us consider another testimony published in *The Review and Herald*, June 29, 1886, par. 9. "The Scriptures are constantly opening to the people of God. There always has been and always will be a truth specifically applicable to each generation. The message given to Noah was present truth for that time; and if the people had accepted that message, they would have been saved from drinking the waters of the flood. Now suppose a certain people should say, 'We have all the truth that our fathers had; we don't want any more,' and the God of heaven should send them a message as He did to Nineveh. What would be the result? The same as would have resulted to the Ninevites if they had not repented. Sentence was pronounced upon them, but their repentance saved them. How thankful we should be that we have a God who will repent of the threatened evil, when the erring return to

Him with true contrition of soul." —*The Review and Herald*, June 29, 1886.

Do formal Christian believers willingly accept the special message for their time? Generally not. Perhaps this is so because the present application of truth requires self-denial and a change of one's lifestyle. The historical development of the church has demonstrated this. The majority of the Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. The majority of the Catholics did not accept Protestantism. In later years, the Protestant believers rejected the message of the Second Advent Movement. It was the present truth for that time, but the majority of Adventists rejected the light of the second angel, the truth about the Sabbath, the third angel's message, and the gift of the Spirit of prophecy.

What is the present truth for us today? It is still the eternal gospel that uplifts the faith of Jesus and the commandments of God. It is the truth by which the Adventists were tested in the time of World Wars I and II. It is the message and testimony that the Lord has given to the Reform Movement, which was called into existence in the shaking time. It also includes the Bible-based resolutions and recommendations that the General Conference makes from time to time to alert and protect God's people in this time of darkness and apostasy.

Therefore, the present truth has always been and continues to be a test of one's faith in and connection to the living God.

Present truth is a test

In this connection, making reference to the Sabbath, the Spirit of prophecy affirms: "Special truths have been adapted to the conditions of the generations as they have existed. The present truth, which is a test to the people of this generation, was not a test to the people of generations far back. If the light which now shines upon us in regard to the Sabbath of the fourth commandment had been given to the generations in the past, God would have held them accountable for that light." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 693.

The Sabbath truth is not a new message. However, the messenger of the Lord states that our responsibility is related to the knowledge and

What is the present truth for us today? It is still the eternal gospel that uplifts the faith of Jesus and the commandments of God.



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light that we are given. Therefore the apostle James writes: "... To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." James 4:17.

This principle is even clearer in the following verses: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin." Luke 12:47, 48; John 15:22.

The sphere of our sanctification and perfection depends on our knowledge. God is righteous and merciful. He does not require the impossible of believers. He only permits temptations to come to us that we can resist through the power of the Spirit of God. Therefore, He expects of His followers that they will call for divine help to obtain the victory over temptations and sins in their sphere. For the sins of ignorance let us pray as did the psalmist, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Psalm 19:12), and we will be covered by the righteousness of Christ and His sacrifice.

Our actions show the character of our faith

Who would we consider to be an unbeliever? Many would say an unbeliever is an atheist, but can we be sure that this concept is correct? Note that in the writings of the Spirit of prophecy "unbelievers" are those who have not accepted the present truth. This may seem shocking, but that is the definition that appears in the testimonies: "... Yet he has not accepted the truth for this time; he is an *unbeliever*,..." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 364.

In the Revelation, it is written that faithful believers can be found in every denomination (see Revelation 18:4), but it is also written that many who have preached in the name of the Lord will, in the day of reckoning, not be recognized as His children. Matthew 7:21-23. The testimonies say the same thing: "They ["people

who profess to believe present truth"] may profess much faith; but they deceive their own souls, for they will act out all the faith that they really possess. *Their works show the character of their faith and testify to those around them that the coming of Christ is not to be in this generation. According to their faith will be their works.* Their preparations are being made to remain in this world. They are ... citizens of this world." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 196,197.

Our decisions, words, and actions reveal the character of our faith. But good works can also be motivated by self-centered purposes and be deceptive, therefore God alone can judge. Nevertheless, the Lord expects His church to exercise discretion based on what a person does.

When those in other denominations hear the present truth and are convicted, it will be seen whether they are true believers or not, depending on what they do with the light they are given. Whether they accept the light or reject it is their personal decision. Whether or not they live according to that light is their own choice, but they thus show whether they are believers or unbelievers.

The problem of people having only a theoretical faith was faced by the apostles in the early Christian church. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." James 2:17, 18.

Surely the question will be asked, "What if people accept part of the present truth but reject other parts? Are they considered believers, or not?"

Professing to believe a part of the present truth

Today, we encounter many different Christian denominations—Protestant as well as Seventh-day Adventist—some of which are very close to our understanding of the truth, while others are not so close but still believe some basic Biblical truth. Today this happens a lot with members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Although they profess to be Adventists, what is their position toward the present truth? What should we

relate to them? Sister White wrote a testimony to the believers in New York on August 3, 1861, considering similar questions. At that time, the Seventh-day Baptists and the Millerites were very close in their understanding to the teachings of the Adventists, but they differed on some points of interpretation.

“While in Roosevelt, New York, August 3, 1861, different churches and families were presented before me. The different influences that have been exerted, and their discouraging results, were shown me. Satan has used as agents individuals professing to believe a part of present truth, while they were warring against a part. Such he can use more successfully than those who are at war with all our faith. His artful manner of bringing in error through partial believers in the truth, has deceived many, and distracted and scattered their faith. This is the cause of the divisions in northern Wisconsin. Some receive a part of the message, and reject another portion. Some accept the Sabbath and reject the third angel’s message; yet because they have received the Sabbath they claim the fellowship of those who believe all the present truth. Then they labor to bring others into the same dark position with themselves. They are not responsible to anyone. They have an independent faith of their own. Such are allowed to have influence, when no place should be given to them, notwithstanding their pretensions to honesty.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 326.

We must consider that the Teacher of all faithful believers is the Spirit of God. He teaches, recalls, and explains the truth. Those who have the same Spirit will reach unity of understanding on doctrinal and moral points and will form a united body.

The Biblical principle regarding the light is extremely important and refers not just to some but to all points of truth. If a believer does not have the knowledge of present truth, he will not be held responsible for light that he does not know. But when a true believer comes in contact with the light, he will readily accept it. For a person to accept part of the light and reject another part is very dangerous. Concerning this Jesus explained: “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and

shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:19.

According to the quotation above, the believers in New York wanted to increase their membership and attract more souls by opening the door and making church membership more accessible to those whose faith was close to theirs. They considered such souls honest believers. Nevertheless, the inspired testimony of God did not support that idea.

Honesty and the faith of Jesus

Considering the problem in the churches in northern Wisconsin and New York, Sister White explained how to understand true, honest faith. “Honest souls will see the straight chain of present truth. They will see its harmonious connections, link after link uniting into a great whole, and will lay hold upon it. The present truth is not difficult to be understood, and the people whom God is leading will be united upon this broad, firm platform. He will not use individuals of different faith, opinions, and views, to scatter and divide. Heaven and holy angels are working to unite, to bring into the unity of the faith, into the one body. Satan opposes this, and is determined to scatter, and divide, and bring in different sentiments, that the prayer of Christ may not be answered: ‘Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.’ John 17:20, 21. Jesus designed that the faith of His people should be one. If one goes forth preaching one thing, and another differing with him preaches something else, how can those who believe through their word be one? There will be difference of sentiments.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 326, 327.

In her writings, Sister White leaves no doubt that honest Christians, who really have the faith of Jesus and keep the commandments of God, will be inspired by the Spirit of God and will have unity in understanding all points of truth as the church of God understands them. If one

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is convinced of the truth but does not unite with the people of God, what does this show? In the moment when the light comes to these souls and sufficient evidence of the present truth is given, an honest soul will not resist but gladly leave an apostate church and join the forces with the visible, organized body of Christ.

“Every believer should be whole-hearted in his attachment to the church. Its prosperity should be his first interest, and unless he feels under sacred obligations to make his connection with the church a benefit to it rather than to himself, it can do far better without him.” —(*The Review and Herald*, February 19, 1880) *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 18.

How is a person who has no interest in connecting with God’s people to be considered? The Spirit of prophecy considers him an unbeliever. And in the specific case of marriage, the Lord does not countenance making a covenant with such a person. Such a case is mentioned in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 364: “My sister, dare you disregard these plain and positive directions? As a child of God, a subject of Christ’s kingdom, the purchase of His blood, how can you connect yourself with one who does not acknowledge His claims, who is not controlled by His Spirit? The commands I have quoted are not the word of man, but of God. Though the companion of your choice were in all other respects worthy (which he is not), yet he has not accepted the truth for this time; he is an unbeliever, and you are forbidden of heaven to unite yourself with him. You cannot, without peril to your soul, disregard this divine injunction.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 364.

It is very difficult to be strong in such a situation, especially if feelings, friendship, and engagement have already become involved. Therefore, God’s Word warns every believer to avoid taking steps that can lead to unhappiness and great struggles in this life and creating great obstacles to his or her salvation.

Avoiding compromise

Some consider it advantageous to approach believers of other denominations and become friends so as to win their confidence and find a

way to cooperate with them, seeking to achieve some doctrinal agreement, even if compromise is necessary. Is this wise, faithful advice for the people of God? What do we read in the Spirit of prophecy? What can we see from past experience?

“Let it be understood that Seventh-day Adventists can make no compromise. In your opinions and faith there must not be the least appearance of wavering; the world has a right to know what to expect of us, and will look upon us as dishonest, as hiding our real sentiments and principles out of policy, if we carry even the semblance of being uncommitted till the popular voice has pointed out the safe way. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, which Christ said He would send into the world, was to bear an unwavering testimony.” —(MS 16, 1890) *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 95; *Evangelism*, p. 179.

“‘If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.’ Purity and steadfastness of purpose are the conditions of receiving light from God. He who desires to know the truth must be willing to accept all that it reveals. *He can make no compromise with error.* To be wavering and halfhearted in allegiance to truth is to choose the darkness of error and satanic delusion....

“Jesus Himself *never purchased peace by compromise.* His heart overflowed with love for the whole human race, but He was never indulgent to their sins. He was too much their friend to remain silent while they were pursuing a course that would ruin their souls, the souls He had purchased with His own blood. He labored that man should be true to himself, true to his higher and eternal interest. The servants of Christ are called to the same work, and they should beware lest, in seeking to prevent discord, they surrender the truth. They are to ‘follow after the things which make for peace’ (Romans 14:19); but real peace can never be secured by compromising principle. And no man can be true to principle without exciting opposition. A Christianity that is spiritual will be opposed by the children of disobedience. But Jesus bade His disciples, ‘Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.’ Those who are true to God need not fear the power of men nor the enmity of Satan.

In Christ their eternal life is secure. Their only fear should be lest they surrender the truth, and thus betray the trust with which God has honored them.” —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 312, 313, 356.

“Now [after the end of pagan persecution] the church was in fearful peril. Prison, torture, fire, and sword were blessings in comparison with this. *Some of the Christians stood firm, declaring that they could make no compromise. Others were in favor of yielding or modifying some features of their faith and uniting with those who had accepted a part of Christianity, urging that this might be the means of their full conversion.* That was a time of deep anguish to the faithful followers of Christ. Under a cloak of pretended Christianity, Satan was insinuating himself into the church, to corrupt their faith and turn their minds from the word of truth....

“After a long and severe conflict, the faithful few decided to dissolve all union with the apostate church if she still refused to free herself from falsehood and idolatry. They saw that separation was an absolute necessity if they would obey the Word of God. They dared not tolerate errors fatal to their own souls, and set an example which would imperil the faith of their children and children’s children. To secure peace and unity they were ready to make any concession consistent with fidelity to God; but they felt that even peace would be too dearly purchased at the sacrifice of principle. *If unity could be secured only by the compromise of truth and righteousness, then let there be difference, and even war.*” —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 42, 43, 45.

United in the truth, this should be our consistent principle. The Spirit of prophecy warns: “In your genuine unity is your strength. There is a great work before us. Those who believe the truth, present truth for this time, are few. Let these be bound together in bonds of closest Christian fellowship, to strengthen one another. Let them stand shoulder to shoulder, hearts blended together in oneness, and bound up with Jesus Christ.” —*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, p. 19.

The church’s judgment

Sometimes we receive questions such as, “Does the church have a right to judge who is a believer and who is an unbeliever? Does the church have

a right to decide what is present truth and what is not?” Regarding the authority that God has bestowed upon His church, let us consider the following testimonies.

“The Word of God does not give license for one man to set up his judgment in opposition to the judgment of the church, neither is he allowed to urge his opinions against the opinions of the church. If there were no church discipline and government, the church would go to fragments; it could not hold together as a body. There have ever been individuals of independent minds who have claimed that they were right, that God had especially taught, impressed, and led them. Each has a theory of his own, views peculiar to himself, and each claims that his views are in accordance with the Word of God. Each one has a different theory and faith, yet each claims special light from God. These draw away from the body, and each one is a separate church of himself. All these cannot be right, yet they all claim to be led of the Lord. The Word of Inspiration is not Yea and Nay, but Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 428, 429.

“To every church I would bear the message that man is not to exalt his own judgment. Meekness and lowliness of heart will lead men to desire counsel at every step. And the Lord will say, ‘Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.’ It is our privilege to learn of Jesus. But when men, full of self-confidence, think that it is their place to give counsel, instead of desiring to be counseled by their experienced brethren, they will listen to voices that will lead them in strange paths.” —*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 501.

“Christ gives power to the voice of the church. ‘Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ No such thing is countenanced as one man’s starting out upon his own individual responsibility and advocating what views he chooses, irrespective of the judgment of the church. God has bestowed the highest power under heaven upon His church. It is the voice of God in His united people in church capacity which is to be respected.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 450, 451.

“... Man is not to exalt his own judgment. Meekness and lowliness of heart will lead men to desire counsel at every step.”



“Organization is to bring into agreement and union individuals who will pledge themselves to have a care for each other, to advise with and counsel each other.”

“Organization is to bring into agreement and union individuals who will pledge themselves to have a care for each other, to advise with and counsel each other. Elders, local and traveling, are appointed by the church and by the Lord to oversee the church, to reprove, exhort, and rebuke the unruly and to comfort the feeble-minded. There is no higher tribunal upon earth than the church of God. And if the members of the church will not submit to the decision of the church, and will not be counseled and advised by it, they cannot be helped. If one and then another think they know best and choose their own judgment instead of the judgment of the church, what kind of a church would we have? What would be the use of a church if each one is permitted to choose his own course of action? Everything would be in the greatest confusion; there would be no harmony, no union....

“God has bestowed power on the church and the ministers of the church, and it is not a light matter to resist the authority and despise the judgment of God’s ministers.... You should have submitted to the judgment of the church. If they decided wrong, God could take hold of this matter in His own time and vindicate the right. He does not lay upon you the responsibility of keeping the church in order.” —*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 5, pp. 296, 297.

Conclusion

To summarize, God’s church has been entrusted with the present truth, and one who does not accept it—even if he accepts some portions of it and rejects others—is to be considered an unbeliever.

An honest Christian who does not have the light of present truth will be accountable for the light which he has. However, if he comes in contact with the body of Christ, receives the knowledge of the present truth, and then rejects it, he cannot be considered true or a believer.

God authorizes the marriage relationship to be formed only between church members—believers in the present truth.

In conclusion, we understand that God’s church has a visible, organized body on earth that is authorized to exercise good judgment.

Because of the limitations human beings face in their sphere and in lack of information, this judgment is not as perfect as the judgment of God Himself. Nevertheless God does not authorize individuals to oppose the authority of the church which He Himself has given the church.

The Word of God establishes principles, laws, rules, and limitations for the believers’ benefit and blessing. Therefore, each believer, and especially those who are chosen as leaders, should “watch over the flock” and help the members and interested souls understand the importance of faith and faithfulness toward our Lord Jesus Christ. God’s holy Word states through the apostle Paul: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” Hebrews 13:17.

“Our work must be an earnest one. We are not to fight as those who beat the air. The ministry, the pulpit, and the press demand people like Caleb, who will do and dare, people whose eyes are single to detect the truth from error, whose ears are consecrated to catch the words from the faithful Watcher. And the Spirit from the throne of God will make itself felt upon a degenerate Christianity, a corrupt world, ready to be consumed by the long-deferred judgments of an offended God.” —(Manuscript 92, 1897) *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 407.

May the Lord bless His people to keep their understanding and teaching rooted in the Scriptures so they may be united and enlightened by His Spirit. **SW**



Terms of Communion

By Larry Watts

One third of the world acknowledges the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God. This 33% includes Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants of all kinds—Pentecostals, Anglicans, Evangelicals, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and all other Christian groups. But only “Protestant Fundamentalists” consider the sixty-six books of the Bible as their sole rule of faith and practice. “Sola Scriptura” was the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation, and so it should be today. But, in too many cases, other things have come in or have been taken away.

“Had the Reformation, after attaining a degree of success, consented to temporize to secure favor with the world, it would have been untrue to God and to itself, and would thus have ensured its own destruction. The experience of these noble Reformers contains a lesson for all succeeding ages.... The same unswerving adherence to the Word of God manifested at that crisis of the Reformation is the only hope of reform today.” —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 204, 205.

“The apostle Paul declared, looking down to the last days: ‘The time will come when they

will not endure sound doctrine.’ 2 Timothy 4:3. That time has fully come. The multitudes do not want Bible truth, because it interferes with the desires of the sinful, world-loving heart; and Satan supplies the deceptions which they love.

“But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.... Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support.” —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 594, 595.

But “Why the Bible?” What is it about this Book that makes it authoritative in all matters of faith and practice? And, more specifically, how does the Bible define terms of communion? Before we go there, we will consider several attributes of the Bible. (1) Why is it necessary? (2) Is its inspiration unique? (3) What makes it authoritative? (4) What is its purpose?

Why it is necessary

The 1689 *London Baptist Confession of Faith* describes the necessity of inspiration this way: “The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain,



and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience, although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inex-

cusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in diversified manners to reveal Himself, and to declare His will unto His church." –Paragraph 1.

There are many similar statements from the pen of Sister Ellen G. White, such as the following: "Would you gain a knowledge of God and Christ, whom He sent into the world to live and die for sinners? An earnest, diligent study of the Bible is necessary in order to gain this knowledge." –*Counsels on Health* (1903), p. 369.

Even amid the unblemished nature of Eden, God deemed it necessary to have direct communication with, or impart special revelation to, Adam and Eve. Otherwise how could they be aware of God's testing requirements? While they had a view of creation unmarred by sin, which shouted out the existence and character of the Creator of nature, Adam and Eve still needed special revelation. Nature alone could not specify the conditions for remaining in the garden with access to the tree of life. The instruction, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But ..." (Genesis 2:16, 17) came from (and could only come from) special, not natural, revelation.

Indeed, nature alone could never impart the knowledge necessary to perform specific actions at specific times when God desired to reveal His intentions in advance of impending judgments or to thwart and unmask the advances of the adversary. Had God not spoken directly to the Edenic pair, they could not have known "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Romans 12:2.

"Before the entrance of sin not a cloud rested upon the minds of our first parents to obscure

their perception of the character of God. They were perfectly conformed to the will of God. For a covering a beautiful light, the light of God, surrounded them. This clear and perfect light illuminated everything which they approached.

"Nature was their lesson book. In the Garden of Eden the existence of God was demonstrated, His attributes were revealed, in the objects of nature that surrounded them. Everything upon which their eyes rested spoke to them. The invisible things of God, 'even His everlasting power and divinity,' were clearly seen, being understood by the things that were made.

"But while it is true that in the beginning God could be discerned in nature, it does not follow that after the Fall a perfect knowledge of God was revealed in the natural world to Adam and his posterity. Nature could convey her lessons to man in his innocence. But transgression brought a blight upon the earth and intervened between nature and nature's God. Had Adam and Eve never disobeyed their Creator, had they remained in the path of perfect rectitude, they would have continued to learn of God through His works. But when they listened to the tempter and sinned against God, the light of the garments of heavenly innocence departed from them. Deprived of the heavenly light, they could no longer discern the character of God in the works of His hand." –*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 255, 256.

Thus, while man can know something of God from His created works, a fuller revelation of Him and His will requires special revelation, especially after the fall.

"Upon every page of the great volume of His created works may still be traced His handwriting. Nature still speaks of her Creator. Yet these revelations are partial and imperfect. And in our fallen state, with weakened powers and restricted vision, we are incapable of interpreting aright. We need the fuller revelation of Himself that God has given in His written Word." –*Education*, p. 17.

If special revelation was necessary for a sinless and perfect man, it is even more necessary for human beings who inherited sinful flesh since the fall. This is not to diminish the truths nature imparts despite the curse of sin, for they

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leave man without excuse on the judgment day. Psalm 19:1-3; Romans 1:18-25. Interpreting the evidence of natural revelation in their own way, men have attempted to suppress and even deny God's existence and authority; but He has provided another witness—special revelation. Through it man becomes doubly accountable for the truth God reveals, and it is only thus that one can know the divine will for him personally and for mankind collectively (as we shall see later).

The written Word

As we have seen, special revelation is necessary; but it also needs to be in a form that can be shared. In early history, men had such minds that written records were unnecessary; but as the human race declined in mental and intellectual strength, written records became very important for documentation and to avoid misunderstanding.

When something is written down, it is possible to preserve the information without error. If information is passed from one generation to another simply through oral traditions, it takes only one in the chain of oral transmission to pervert an entire message. Thus, to protect His revelation from the fallible memory of men, from unrighteous men, and from the malice of Satan, God gave it in written form. One of the first written revelations He gave to mankind was the Ten Commandments.

It is known that not everything that God inspired of old has been preserved for us; but we can trust that what comprises our collection of Scripture was done at His direction, for "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2 Peter 1:21. That He gave special instructions to some that are not available to us should not concern us. In every age there is a "present truth" that is specific to that time—a blueprint to be followed. Our responsibility is not to build an ark or a tabernacle. Some of the specific aspects of those projects may be mysterious to us, but what is known about what was especially revealed then are things that are beneficial and necessary for this time. They have been preserved and written down "for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." 1 Corinthians 10:11.

Thus, we have a written standard, not an oral one. God preserved what we need to know in the Old and New Testaments—the prophetic and apostolic messages recorded in His Word, the Bible. And as He promised, the light of its pages shines brighter and brighter for those who long for light and righteousness. Proverbs 4:18. Furthermore, one of the main reasons for these revelations is "that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." 1 Corinthians 1:10.

"Unity is strength; disunion is weakness and defeat." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 293.

Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures

Under the term "Holy Scriptures," or the "Word of God," we have "all the counsel of God" gathered together into sixty-six books by His Spirit. Acts 20:27; 2 Timothy 3:16.

"The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony." —*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 416.

"God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms." —*The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

But how is it that these sixty-six books, and not any others, are considered as given by the inspiration of God and sufficient for defining the rules of faith and life? How can we know that other books, such as those commonly known as the Apocrypha, are not also of divine inspiration and therefore authoritative for the church of God? To go in any direction but using the Word as justification would be to tacitly undermine it. And this we must always be careful *not* to do. The answer is from Jesus Christ Himself. Neither He nor His disciples ever quoted or alluded to the Apocrypha or other such sources as authoritative, but they did refer to that collection of books known today as the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament Scriptures as authoritative. After Christ, the writings of His apostles were validated by their personal witness, their mutual testimonies, the consis-

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tency of their doctrines, and their willingness to die for what they taught and believed (not to mention that they were Christ's apostles and gave evidence of receiving the early rain and power even to perform miracles). All of this, plus the testimony of the Holy Spirit and the witness of God's faithful people (see Hebrews 11:33-39), provides sufficient evidence that the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are authoritative.

In addition to his own personal witness, the apostle Peter says that we have something even better: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." 2 Peter 1:19 (see also verses 16-18). Of all the reasons to accept the authority of Scripture, its ability to lay out the future is presented by the apostle Peter as incontrovertible. While the personal testimony of two or three witnesses will suffice in an earthly court, we have more than that to confirm the Scriptures as we have them today—the heavenly confirmation of prophecy to seal the Word as truly inspired and sufficient for defining the terms of communion. The Bible is the only true predictor of future events, and the fact that what it presents is correct and stands the tests of time and history makes it truly unique. And even more, its prophecy has described even the people and the movements that would be inspired by its revelations, as we shall see. Now we need to ask, Can we sustain terms of communion that are not expressly found in the Scriptures?

We have rules of faith and practice that are supported by the Scriptures. Such are the 37 *Principles of Faith*. If they are not founded upon the Word, they would not be a standard that we should uphold and consider as terms of communion. They are authoritative insofar as they agree with the holy Word of God and His "present truth" enlightenment. Otherwise why should one even listen to a sermon or read an inspired article? If someone comes and speaks contrary to the Word, we hear him not, for there is no light in him. But when God is speaking through His servant, that is authoritative, and it is our duty to act as did the noble Bereans.

The authority of Scripture

In summary of our first premise, the written Word is necessary and part of God's plan for uniting His true followers in a bond of perfection for the propagation of the gospel. And the authority of Scripture is not dependent upon the testimony of any man or church; God is evidenced as its Author through prophecy and the testimony of His Son. These infallible proofs are also confirmed by the work of the Holy Spirit in bearing witness to the authority of the Word in every heart.

Nevertheless, the ultimate authority of the Scriptures actually rests upon the authority—the credibility—of God Himself. God declares that it is His Word and that it will be either believed or doubted. The Word declares itself to be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Timothy 3:16.

While the testimony of men and the church throughout the ages can be helpful in confirming the beauty and efficacy of Scripture, they can only confirm that—not decide whether—it is God who speaks in His Word. Human argumentation may or may not be sound, but that is not the central issue. If the Bible is God's Word, it is true and authoritative. A man or even a church may at times use false arguments in an effort to support the Word (or an interpretation of it); but just because some use false arguments, incorrect facts, or fallacious assumptions in seeking to prove the truthfulness of God's Word, that does not change in any degree the truthfulness of the Word itself. A false argument or human explanation may even discredit Scripture to honest minds, and God will hold those accountable who misrepresent Him and His Word; but the misrepresentation does not change the nature of the authoritative, inspired Word itself. "Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar...." Romans 3:4. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." 1 John 5:9.

Men often consider the testimony of other men helpful in resolving certain issues, conflicts, and debates; and the greater the authority one can provide in an argument or dispute, the

more likely his ideas will be accepted. But here it is important to note that any earthly authority must depend for its authority on something greater than itself. Therefore, the authority of the holy Word cannot come from men, otherwise the Word of God would be subject to men. This, unfortunately, is the position of many who call themselves Christians, and some of us may also risk thinking in this way. But the holy Word comes from God Himself, and there is no higher appeal than He.

Any attempt by a church or fallible men to confer authority upon the Scriptures is Babylonian thinking. Whether they realize it or not, such an attempt would imply that the church is greater than the Scriptures; and when men claim the right to do this, they destroy the authority of the very Word they seek to establish, all the while exalting the church and themselves in place of that Word. The next step often taken is to believe that they have the right to change it (think themselves able to change times and laws, Daniel 7:25, Catholic version). Rome believes that the church created the Scriptures—gave birth to the Scriptures. But it is the Word that gives birth to the church, not vice versa. The authority of Scripture can never rest upon the church or church councils; it rests in God alone. The apostles presented the correct order: “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.” James 1:18. “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” 1 Peter 1:23.

So, we can say with certainty that God’s Word begat the church and that the authority of Scripture resides solely in the living God. That is why it is to be believed and obeyed. Without absolute certainty that you are dealing with God’s Word, you can only end up with probabilities. Calvin put it this way: “Unless this certainty, higher and stronger than any human judgment, be present, it will be vain to fortify the authority of scripture by argument, to establish it by common agreement of the church, or to confirm it with other helps, for unless this foundation is laid, its authority will always remain in doubt. Conversely, once we have embraced it devoutly as its dignity deserves, and have recognized it

to be above the common sort of things, those arguments—not strong enough before to engraft and fix the certainty of scripture in our minds—become very useful aids....” —John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill, vol. 1, Book 1, Chapter 8, Section 1; quoted from pp. 81, 82; © 1960, The Westminster Press; reissued 2006 by Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky.

Unless we begin with the foundational principle that God speaks authoritatively in His Word, it is impossible to arrive at certainty based on any kind of human argumentation. We must begin building on the foundation of certainty and authority of the Word; then—and only then—are other arguments of any value. And once the certainty of the Word is established, it becomes possible to establish the Biblical principles upon which communion can occur.

But how does it happen that the authority of Scripture is realized and accepted by some and rejected by others? This question can lead to endless debate; but the Word itself states that this comes about by the working of the Holy Spirit, who illuminates people’s minds. When we allow God by His Spirit to communicate with us through His inspired Word (as well as through nature and His providence), our understanding is enlightened so we can believe. John Newton expressed it like this in his famous poem, “Amazing Grace”: “I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.” We were not only blind; we were also deaf, but now we hear. God illuminates our understanding by His Spirit; otherwise we would not be able to choose to believe what He presents in the Scriptures. “But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have

Once the certainty of the Word is established, it becomes possible to establish the Biblical principles upon which communion can occur.



received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." 1 Corinthians 2:10-12.

God's authority

When we accept the divine Word as authoritative simply because it is God's Word, a question still comes begging: If it is true that one receives his authority from another in a higher position, can there be a highest authority? With this query we are in danger of falling into the bottomless pit. This is what happened in heaven when Satan and his followers "rebelled against the authority of the Son" (*Early Writings*, p. 146) and fell headlong into perdition.

While God and His Son could have dealt with the rebellion in heaven by means of divine authority, they chose a different course. And that is the amazing grace of the entire plan of salvation. They chose to appeal to and exercise, not authority, but the principle of disinterested love.

"Love cannot live without action, and every act increases, strengthens, and extends it. Love will gain the victory when argument and authority are powerless. Love works not for profit nor reward; yet God has ordained that great gain shall be the certain result of every labor of love. It is diffusive in its nature and quiet in its operation, yet strong and mighty in its purpose to overcome great evils. It is melting and transforming in its influence, and will take hold of the lives of the sinful and affect their hearts when every other means has proved unsuccessful. Wherever the power of intellect, of authority, or of force is employed, and love is not manifestly present, the affections and will of those whom we seek to reach assume a defensive, repelling position, and their strength of resistance is increased. Jesus was the Prince of Peace. He came into the world to bring resistance and authority into subjection to Himself. Wisdom and strength He could command, but the means He employed with which to overcome evil were the wisdom and strength of love. Suffer nothing to divide your interest from your present work until God shall see fit to give you another piece of work in the same field. Seek not for happiness, for it is never to be

found by seeking for it. Go about your duty. Let faithfulness mark all your doings, and be clothed with humility." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 135, 136.

Thus, it seems evident that God realized that His government could be made eternally secure not through the use of authority but only through the praises of His people, and that is exactly what a literal translation of Psalm 22:3 says: "Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel." —*New American Standard Bible*.

"Love will gain the victory when argument and authority are powerless." While Satan appeals to authority (in Luke 4:6 the word "power" [KJV] means "authority"), God appeals to and demonstrates love. "Follow Me," Jesus says.

After inspiring us to follow and learn of Him, He turns to us and says, "Go!" Go into the entire world and preach the gospel. "All power ["authority"—the same word again] is given unto Me. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,... And, lo, I am with you ... to the end...." Matthew 28:18-20. He is sufficient and will be with us, just as the Scriptures are sufficient. His presence makes us an extension of His love. And this occurs as we unite together in Christian fellowship. But how can unity be achieved without clearly defining what binds us? Therefore we have the need to summarize "present truth" in written form.

1. To know specifically what is truth as opposed to error and to clarify what God is saying in His Word to the world in this age, we need explicit terms of communion.

2. To define what unites us to each other as a collective body, we need explicit terms of communion.

3. To fully inform those who wish to join us, as well as those who do not, about what we believe, we need explicit terms of communion. To be honest and open is right. God's people, like the truth, must be transparent, for they—like God Himself—have nothing to hide.

The purpose of Scripture

The Bible contains all the counsel of God. Acts 20:27. It has power to perfect or prepare for every good work all who accept it as their rule of faith.

"Wisdom and strength He could command, but the means He employed with which to overcome evil were the wisdom and strength of love."

2 Timothy 3:16, 17. Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6), promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would lead them into all truth.

The Scriptures are clear that we need to search them, for the gems of truth are “here a little, and there a little.” Isaiah 28:13. Even the book of Daniel states that an understanding of its message would not be unsealed until the time of the end. What God has revealed there and elsewhere—those things that are present truth—God’s people are under divine injunction to learn and share by action and word, both spoken and written. To accomplish this, terms of communion are essential, not only to call sin by its right name but also that the banner of truth may be unitedly upheld before the world.

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 1:13. Well-intended, professing Christians have asked, “Isn’t the Word of God all that is necessary to unite Christians together as members within a particular congregation or denomination?” It would truly be wonderful if that were so, that everyone would live by the holy Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit; but the immediate challenge posed by human differences and such a general term of communion will be absolute confusion if everyone in the congregation becomes a world unto himself and teaches what he likes concerning any particular doctrine. That idea is where Satan began in heaven. And the Word tells us that in the last days it is going to be like that—many will be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” Ephesians 4:14.

How can those who are brought together by the idea that the Bible is the inspired Word ever arrive at an orderly and Biblical unity of faith without agreeing on what they teach concerning particular doctrines? The Bible is of no private interpretation. 2 Peter 1:20. If you can make it say whatever you want it to say, it says nothing at all to others. There is one faith and one Lord, not many.

The problem is not with the Bible, for the Bible does not present contradictory doctrines. God Himself is the Author of the Scriptures, not the author of confusion. Truth does not

contradict truth.

The problem is with sinful man and his propensity to wrest the Scriptures and try to make them justify his own carnal desires.

The apostle Peter refers to such difficulties

when he says that the Scriptures contain “some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” 2 Peter 3:16.

Thus, if we would enjoy a Biblical unity of faith with other professing Christians, we must agree together as to what constitutes the significant truths for this time. To do that, we need explicitly stated fundamental beliefs or terms of communion, not vague, general, or implicitly stated terms (e.g., a simple “We believe the Bible is the Word of God”).

Hold to sound doctrine

An examination of God’s inspired Word reveals that Christ and His apostles sanctioned explicit terms of communion and recommended them to the ministers and members of their time. Repeatedly the apostle Paul sanctions explicit terms of communion when he refers to “sound doctrine”; “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers”; “... Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine”; “Hold fast the form of sound words.” 1 Timothy 1:10; Titus 1:9; 2:1; 2 Timothy 1:13. And he warns his co-workers to be alert, because “the time will come when they [men] will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” 2 Timothy 4:3. Paul exhorts Timothy and Titus to:

- Promote the truth,
- Fulfill their ministry by preaching the Word,
- Hold fast the form of sound words, or doctrine.



Note that Paul did not tolerate different doctrines to be presented in the different churches of Galatia, Ephesus, and Colossae; and neither should ministers do so in the churches of today.

"The present truth is not difficult to be understood, and the people whom God is leading will be united upon this broad, firm platform. He will not use individuals of different faith, opinions, and views, to scatter and divide. Heaven and holy angels are working to unite, to bring into the unity of the faith, into the one body. Satan opposes this, and is determined to scatter, and divide, and bring in different sentiments, that the prayer of Christ may not be answered: 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.' John 17:20, 21. Jesus designed that the faith of His people should be one. If one goes forth preaching one thing, and another differing with him preaches something else, how can those who believe through their word be one? There will be difference of sentiments." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 326, 327.

In Paul's first letter to Timothy 1:3, he admonished his protégé to "charge some that they teach no other doctrine...." Timothy and all faithful ministers are admonished to teach one truth. It was stated above that God's holy Word warrants the use of explicit terms of communion in His church. Now we will consider:

1. Whether the terms of communion should be vague or clear;
2. Whether the terms of communion should be general or specific;

3. Whether the terms of communion should be implicit (implied) or explicit (expressed in certain detail).

What "form of sound words" did Paul counsel Timothy to hold fast to? The phrase of Scripture is not simply, "hold fast

to sound words," but "hold fast to the *form* of sound words." The Greek word translated here as "form" is translated as "pattern" in Hebrews 9:23 (its only other occurrence) and comes from a word which means to receive the impress of an image or as a seal upon clay or wax, so as to leave the hollow form of the original object. Paul's readers were familiar with the concept and would have understood what he was saying. Kings and rulers used such seals to prove and protect the authenticity of their messages. Each seal was unique, being used to positively identify the sender and prevent counterfeiting. Paul was in essence, "Don't accept counterfeit gospels!"

If a teaching does not fit the *form* or pattern of what has been delivered to the saints, then mark that doctrine as corrupt and false. He later marks Hymenaeus and Philetus (see 2 Timothy 2:16-18) as examples of two men who were spreading such falsehoods, "saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some." Hymenaeus and Philetus could be distinguished as false teachers because there was a specific belief that the church had derived from Scripture, and they were teaching contrary to it. Before his departure from Ephesus, Paul warned the elders of the church: "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Acts 20:30. In like manner, all the members of the congregation are commanded to profess together the form of sound words and doctrines.

In his commentary on 2 Timothy 1:13, John Calvin notes the following: "I rather think that Paul commands Timothy to hold fast the doctrine which he had learned not only as to substance, but as to the very form of expression and to regulate his manner of teaching by the rule which had been laid down. Not that we ought to be very scrupulous about words, but because to misrepresent doctrine even in the smallest degree is exceedingly injurious."

And Abraham Taylor, editor of Calvin's commentary, expanded on Calvin's comments: "He, that is Timothy, was not merely to assert the words of Scripture, but he was to hold fast the summary or system of the truths which he had heard from his spiritual father, the system of doctrine he was to keep as a pledge committed to



his trust by the help of the Holy Spirit. Ministers are to hold fast every truth, but above all those particular truths which are the peculiar butt [that is, the object of scorn] of the devil's opposition and meet with rough treatment in the times in which they live."

From the pen of Sister Ellen G. White we read: "Messages of every order and kind have been urged upon Seventh-day Adventists, to take the place of the truth which, point by point, has been sought out by prayerful study, and testified to by the miracle-working power of the Lord. But the waymarks which have made us what we are, are to be preserved, and they will be preserved, as God has signified through His Word and the testimony of His Spirit. He calls upon us to hold firmly, with the grip of faith, to the fundamental principles that are based upon unquestionable authority." —*Special Testimonies*, Series B, No. 2, p. 59 (1904).

"As a people, we are to stand firm on the platform of eternal truth that has withstood test and trial. We are to hold to the sure pillars of our faith. The principles of truth that God has revealed to us are our only true foundation. They have made us what we are. The lapse of time has not lessened their value." —*Special Testimonies*, Series B, No. 2, p. 51.

"No line of truth that has made the Seventh-day Adventist people what they are, is to be weakened. We have the old landmarks of truth, experience, and duty, and we are to stand firmly in defense of our principles, in full view of the world." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 17.

We are to stand by those truths, "profession of faith," "standards," "waymarks," "fundamental principles," and "old landmarks" that have made us what we are and defend them "in full view of the world." And we are to hold fast to and preach those that are especially under attack by the enemy: The family and the permanent nature of marriage; the Sabbath, which is at the heart of the eternal law; and the gospel with its full power to free everyone from sin if he will but come to Christ and acknowledge no authority but His.

Just as Moses was instructed to make the tabernacle according to the pattern or form (Hebrews 9:23) that was given to him (Exodus

25:8, 40), so Timothy and Titus then and we now are to bear witness against all deviations from the form of religion given by God. The apostle Paul gave specific instructions to "mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." Romans 16:17.

It was not simply by the Bible in a general sense but by explicit doctrines within the Bible that dissenters could be recognized. "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." 2 Thessalonians 3:6. Those teachings were not vague, general, implicit terms but explicit, "sound doctrines," "forms ["patterns"] of sound words," from which some had departed.

And in 1 Timothy 6:3, the apostle says: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome [Gr. sound] words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness." And at the end of verse 5 he says what the faithful are to do with such individuals: "... From such withdraw thyself."

How could Timothy obey the command of the apostle to "hold fast the form of sound words" and "withdraw" from disorderly elements if there was no specific, explicit form of "sound doctrine" or sound words to refer to? In the early church, to solve the controversy over circumcision versus no circumcision, the first explicit terms of communion were issued. "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well." Acts 15:28, 29. If the first Christians found it necessary to meet a specific challenge at a specific time with specific terms, then we at the end of time have all the more reason to have well-defined, explicit terms of communion to meet present-day challenges.

And, indeed, virtually all churches have resolutions containing terms of communion, otherwise utter chaos and confusion would

If the first Christians found it necessary to meet a specific challenge at a specific time with specific terms, then we at the end of time have all the more reason to have well-defined, explicit terms of communion to meet present-day challenges.



reign in their ranks. Some have explicit terms of communion, while those of others are more implicit. Some are Biblically based; others are not. The apostolic church, after only a few years of existence, saw the need to make specific resolutions to clarify issues. The Adventist Church, as well as the Reform Movement, from its beginning, provided well-explained points of faith to protect the believers from false teachers disguised as harmless sheep and from human speculation. Therefore, to avoid a fragmentation in presenting the testimony of Scripture and to give clear and united explanations to its members as well as to the world, it is not only proper but necessary to have written, specific, and explicit terms of communion. They are a testimony for the truth and against error, while vague terms of communion that are open to interpretation do not clearly define what God says in His Word.

1. Explicit terms of communion are a testimony to all other churches and professing Christians what that particular communion believes, and they also define with whom one can unite in religious service. We desire union with all professing Christians but only on the basis of present truth. How can we know that we are truly united unless we have agreed upon explicit terms of communion?

2. Not to have explicit terms of communion is to hide from candidates for membership the errors or sins for which they may be disciplined and denied from taking the Lord's Supper, or be barred from office, or be disfellowshipped. Before a church can exercise discipline, its members need to know what terms of communion must be adhered to so as to have spiritual communion with all other members of that body. Without explicit terms of communion, a member does not know where the line of transgression is until he has already crossed it. When terms of communion are left open to interpretation, ministers and churches are at liberty to divest a member of his rights and privileges on a whim. Therefore, it is simply faithful, truthful, and honest to make terms of communion explicit and to put them in writing.

The second main point of our introductory text speaks of "sound words": "Hold fast the

form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me." 2 Timothy 1:13. Paul encourages Timothy to use only sound words—literally healthful or wholesome words, in contrast to unhealthful or corrupt words. In his latter letters (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus), over and over again the apostle emphasizes the need for ministers, elders, and members to use only sound doctrine and sound words.

In 2 Timothy 4:3, the apostle wrote that the time would come when many would not endure sound doctrine, inferring that what is taught and what should be lived—sound doctrine—would be rare. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." Fables are figments of man's imagination; this was another way of saying that false teaching would be rampant in the last days. This is an idea very different from what we hear some saying today—that anyone who believes even part of present truth is a member of the remnant church.

Earlier, the apostle wrote to the church at Corinth that the divisions they were having indicated that heresies were obviously present. 1 Corinthians 11:18, 19. In addition, the text says that when heresies come in "they which are approved may be made manifest among you," because the faithful will not be swayed by those heresies but will follow the sound words of the Scriptures, thus leading to a division, or separation. "God will arouse His people," writes Sister White; "if other means fail, heresies will come in among them, which will sift them, separating the chaff from the wheat." *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 707.

Scripture does not forbid but expects God's people to compose songs, use forms of worship, establish government electing proper church officers, provide for discipline of members, and clearly present doctrine to dispel the darkness of error—in other words, to provide explicit terms of communion. However, it must be clearly understood that no authority has been given to Christ's church to form explicit terms of communion that are not founded upon and derived

Only those terms of communion that are based on sound principles of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will be accepted by Heaven.

from the Scriptures. To disregard the Word, and especially to abrogate God's law, puts a church on the side of the great apostate and adversary of souls.

"The very beginning of the great apostasy was in seeking to supplement the authority of God by that of the church. Rome began by enjoining what God had not forbidden, and she ended by forbidding what He had explicitly enjoined." —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 289, 290.

While a church is to be commended for plainly and openly stating its terms of communion, only those terms of communion that are based on sound principles of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will be accepted by Heaven. One who supports a church which espouses erroneous or sinful terms of communion automatically partakes of the same sin(s) and error(s) stated in that church's terms of communion. Participation in, financial support of, or attendance at such a church amounts to tacit support of falsehood.

To make a covenant with God individually, collectively as a family, or as a church is something God's Word approves. Such public covenants based on Scripture can even bind the descendants of those who made them. This was illustrated in Deuteronomy 29:10-29. The people of Israel made a covenant with God that also bound their posterity. This covenant, which God set before the people through Moses, was not only in harmony with God's Word and will; it was also willingly entered into by those who were present. Furthermore, they agreed to be bound by it themselves (verses 12, 15, first part) and promised that their descendants would come under the same covenant, with the same privileges and responsibilities. Verses 15, 22.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul points out that, when a covenant is made, "no man disannulleth or addeth thereto." Galatians 3:15. He then goes on to say in Galatians 3:17 (which refers to Deuteronomy 29) that if a people makes a covenant with God and their posterity are included in it, then their posterity are bound by it. In 2 Timothy 3:1-3, Paul writes that in the "last days" men would be "without natural affection, trucebreakers..." or "covenant breakers..." We cannot be considered covenant breakers if we are

not parties to the covenant. But if we are parties to it and do not respect it, then we may indeed be considered violators of it. An example is the marriage covenant; according to God's Word, a man and a woman are legally married when they make a covenant with each other. And God is party to that covenant. Just as God does not change, so that covenant does not change. God keeps His covenant, and therefore we must keep it as well. Furthermore, our posterity are affected by how we keep the covenant.

When the *Principles of Faith* were formulated for this body in 1925 and revised in 1997, the representatives of the church made a solemn vow and covenant to obey the present truth. We, their spiritual posterity, are affected by what they did. Without their mutual agreement, consent, and commitment to God then, we would not be here as a body today. God's Word therefore binds the posterity who descended as spiritual children from those original covenanters.

We are to profess and live according to the faithful witnesses of Christ who have preceded us. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls...." Jeremiah 6:16. Walk according to your faithful forefathers in the faith. We see the same message in the New Testament in Hebrews 11. The apostle states why it is important to follow their faith: "That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Hebrews 6:12. The promises are for those who reconfirm and adhere to the sacred vows made by those who went before them.

Christians are exhorted in Philippians 2:15 to "be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." One of the qualifications for a church elder is the same—to be blameless. 1 Timothy 3:2. This does not mean that such a person never makes a mistake in his life. But it does mean that he is faithful in teaching searching souls the whole counsel of God—the complete terms of communion—so that later no one can say, "I didn't know the church believed that!"

The promises are for those who reconfirm and adhere to the sacred vows made by those who went before them.



After the apostle commands Timothy to be faithful to explicit and Biblical terms of communion, he says, “Hold fast.” Don’t hold fast to just any terms of communion, to just any doctrines, but “hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me.” These words were not just for Timothy; they are for all ministers and elders of the church and the church members themselves for as long as time will last.

“Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.” Proverbs 22:28. If this was true for property, something transitory and earthly, how much more it pertains to the eternal doctrine and truths of God. True terms of communion are what the apostles and martyrs died for. The Word of God is the inheritance bequeathed to us by God through the prophets, apostles, and faithful scribes. The Word is our creed. The points summarized in the *Principles of Faith* constitute the landmarks, the boundary markers, of that inheritance. We hold those points as present truth, and each of us made a covenant at our baptism to uphold them. They

have been confirmed to us through the blood and example of faithful martyrs. By God’s grace, it is both our privilege and sacred duty to hold fast the faith that has been delivered to the saints until Christ calls His people home. As the Lord said to the remnant of the church of Thyatira in Revelation 2:25, “But that which ye have already **hold fast** till I come.”

Man is to live by every word that proceeds out of God’s mouth. That Word is sacred. Those who do not hold it as such will go from Him. Furthermore, at the end of time, God’s people will have to stand on His holy Word alone. “The means by which we can overcome the wicked one is that by which Christ overcame—the power of the Word. God does not control our minds without our consent; but if we desire to know and to do His will, His promises are ours: ‘Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’ ‘If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching.’ John 8:32; 7:17, R.V. Through faith in these promises, every man may be delivered from the snares of error and the control of sin.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 258. **SW**

7 Secrets of Healthy Churches

Secret #1: The church’s leadership and laity have a high regard for Scripture. While this alone does not guarantee a healthy church, congregations in which Scripture is not held as authoritative eventually die.

Secret #2: Healthy churches and their leaders seek to be relevant in today’s world yet without Biblical compromise. When members are more concerned about their own comforts than making sacrifices to save the lost, you can be sure that that church will eventually die.

Secret #3: Healthy churches and their leaders hold to the primacy of preaching. A congregation’s growth and meaningful discipleship ministries require good sermons. Pastors in growing churches spent five times more effort in preparing sermons than did those who preached in unhealthy churches.

Secret #4: Healthy churches have multiple small group structures. Pastors see the critical importance of members and guests connecting in smaller settings.

Secret #5: Healthy churches emphasize corporate prayer and church prayer ministries. Members pray for non-Christians by name and are unashamed to be vocal about the greatest need any person has—salvation through Jesus Christ.

Secret #6: Healthy churches take membership seriously. Those churches whose members do not feel responsible and accountable die.

Secret #7: Healthy churches are highly evangelistic. They have ministries, programs, and emphases helping members to reach out to their unchurched acquaintances with the good news of the gospel.

—From two articles by Thom S. Rainer that first appeared in the July/August and September/October 2006 issues of *Outreach* magazine; <http://www.adventistreview.org/article/1245/archives/issue-2007-1518/seven-secrets-of-healthy-churches>.