

Seventh
Day
Baptist



Beliefs

A Study Guide



The Helping Hand

Seventh Day Baptist Beliefs

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The purposes of *The Helping Hand in Bible Study* are:

- to provide for adults and older youth a quarterly for personal or group use in gaining a continually renewed knowledge of the Bible, Christian beliefs and church life, particularly that characteristic of Seventh Day Baptists.
- to enable such study of Christian convictions as will develop the students' abilities to share their faith.
- to strengthen appreciation of Seventh Day Baptist heritage and conviction of the Sabbath's truths.
- to nurture moral and spiritual aspects of daily living and decision-making.
- to provide resources for daily devotions.
- to encourage the educational ministry of Seventh Day Baptists around the world.

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Using *The Helping Hand* Devotions

Gordon P. Lawton

The Helping Hand has suggested Bible readings and short devotional thoughts for each day. To help your personal devotional time with God, the following outline is offered.

Get settled in your devotional spot. A place where you can read, pray and think without interruption is best. Being in the same place for your devotions helps develop this positive habit.

Begin with prayer. A suggested prayer follows. Your prayer should help you focus on God and recognize His presence with you.

*I am here in Your presence my Lord and my God.
Knowledge of You and direction for the hours ahead
are what I seek. You know my heart and my thoughts.
Instruct me in Your way. Encourage and direct me.
May the memory of this intimate season with You be
sweet and whet my appetite for our future appointments.
Amen.*

Read the Scripture.

Think about the Scripture.

Is God saying anything to me today in this passage?
What can I learn about life as a follower of Jesus Christ
from this passage?
Did I learn something I did not know or had forgotten?

Read the devotional thought.

Ask similar questions to those above.

Think about the day ahead and the need for God's encouragement and intervention.

Pray. Tell God about your love for Him, needs for the day, concerns for others, anything that is in your heart or mind.

Go. Be productive and aware of God's presence with you in all your activities.

Introduction

Janet Thorngate

Seventh Day Baptists consider liberty of thought under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to be essential to Christian belief and practice. Therefore we encourage the unhindered study and open discussion of Scripture. We uphold the individual's freedom of conscience in seeking to determine and obey the will of God.

The following statement is not intended to be exhaustive, but is an expression of our common belief, which is derived from our understanding of Scripture.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Sunday — 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Liberty of Thought

As I approach this study of Seventh Day Baptist beliefs, do I feel free to follow my own thoughts? Dare I express my honest questions? Am I afraid to expose my beliefs to examination and discussion? Today's Scripture reminds me that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." Father, may I be open to your Spirit's freeing power, bold to seek the truth—and to reflect it.

Monday — John 14:26

Guidance of the Holy Spirit

For twenty centuries Christians have been examining and expressing their beliefs. Libraries are filled with statements, creeds, catechisms, commentaries, Christologies, theologies. Father, as I approach this study, send your Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name, to teach me and to remind me of all the things Jesus said to us.

Tuesday — Mark 9:24

Essential to Christian Belief and Practice

What makes our belief and practice Christian? Are you a person in the crowd around Jesus who says, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"? In this attitude we find the essential freedom of God's spirit,

the reminders given by the Counselor. Father, give me the honesty, the openness, the vulnerability necessary to believing and doing your will.

Wednesday — 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Encourage Unhindered Study of Scripture

What hinders my study of Scripture? My mind is made up? I've heard it all before? The Spirit speaks to me directly? Do I encourage unhindered Scripture study by others? By my example? By my tolerance? Father, help me remove hindrances to Bible study.

Thursday — 2 Timothy 2:15

Encourage Open Discussion of Scripture

Does my participation in group discussion of Scripture reflect my own prayerful study? Do I listen as much as I speak? Does my listening say to others in the group, "I believe the Spirit of God can guide you in your interpretation—which may be different from mine and could change mine"? Father, guide our discussion, that we may "correctly handle the word of truth."

Friday — Romans 12:2

The Individual's Freedom of Conscience

Why must it be so hard to discover God's will for me? So many pressures in our world to think this, to believe that! How am I to "be transformed by the renewing of my mind"? Who formed my conscience? Whose conscience do I form? Whose do I pressure? Whose freedom of thought do I restrict? Father, help us to test and approve your good, pleasing and perfect will.

Sabbath — Ephesians 4:3-6, 15

Expression of our Common Belief

Am I apprehensive about the disagreements that may surface as I participate in this study? Do I trust myself to "speak the truth in love"? Can I believe others are capable of it? Father, help us to remember there is "one God and Father of us all." Help us through this experience "in all things to grow up into Christ."

The Testimony from Scripture

The Gospels, which describe Jesus' life and teachings, contain a constant refrain of challenges to believe: Believe my words, believe the Scriptures, believe that I came from God, believe and be healed, believe the good news, believe and be saved.

We see Jesus constantly teaching, encouraging, correcting misunderstandings—sometimes patiently, sometimes impatiently—trying to get through to those who will listen and those who won't. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago...but I say to you...." Always he challenges our literal understanding and application of the Old Testament laws, urging us to a deeper spiritual realm of belief and right living.

The greatest sin of many who opposed Jesus was narrow-mindedness—too narrow an understanding of who God is and what his word is, not a big enough understanding to accept Jesus' larger interpretation of God and his laws (John 8:31-41). He rewarded the man who cried (Mark 9:24), "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Even after his resurrection Jesus continues: "How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe...." So as he walks with disciples on the road to Emmaus, he is again explaining, based on familiar Scriptures, who he is (Luke

24:25-27). He knows it will be a continuous struggle, this belief thing, because they are human, so he assures them the Father will send the Holy Spirit who will "teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). He also knows they will need the support and encouragement of each other: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Throughout the letters to new churches from Paul and the other apostles, the litany of "believes" continues: Believe in God, believe in Christ, believe that he died and rose again, believe the word. Right belief is key to Christian faith in the emerging church. Paul sharpens the contrasts between old and new covenant—law (works) vs belief (faith)—a transformation "by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 10:17; 12:2).

Paul echoes Jesus' freedom theme: belief brings a spiritual freedom from doubt, guilt, sin, fear. Yet we are constantly warned against abuses of that freedom and the worst are those which weaken the body of believers. Unity in the body is to be based on belief, "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," and is to be maintained "by speaking the truth in love (2 Cor. 3:17-18; Eph. 4:3-6, 15; Gal. 5:13-14).

When false prophets and teachers threaten belief, as pre-

dicted, leaders like Timothy are nurtured in how to foster and strengthen true belief: through faithfulness to their Christian heritage, through right handling of the Scriptures, through following the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 2:15; 3:14-18).

Most important is the spirit in which the issue of beliefs is to be handled in the church. Believers are warned against quarreling about words and are reminded that once we think we know it all, we don't. We must take care that the exercise of our freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak (2 Tim. 2:14; 1 John 4:1-3).

The Testimony from History

A church historian, C. C. Goen, reminds us that "If the history of Christian thought shows anything, it shows that no one person or group has ever grasped God's truth whole."¹

For half of the twenty centuries since Jesus' time on earth, the Roman Catholic Church preserved, interpreted and defended the body of Christian belief, both Scripture and other writings. As Protestant denominations began to develop out of failures to reform the established church, those with more authoritative church structure developed doctrinal statements and creeds to define accepted belief. Baptists carried the Reformation

themes of "liberty of conscience" and "priesthood of all believers" further than most other groups. They emerged from the late reformation period (17th Century) with a congregational form of church organization based on a covenant relationship rather than an agreed-upon creed of belief.

No statement of belief has been found for the earliest known Sabbathkeeping Baptist church in England (Mill Yard, 1650s). A simple Scriptural motto echoes through their three centuries of writings and records: "Those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 12:17b).

Similarly, no statement of belief has been found for the first Seventh Day Baptist Church in America (Newport, Rhode Island, 1671). Their covenant makes it clear that they expected God might yet reveal to them, within their covenant fellowship, new truth not yet understood.²

By 1801 when the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference was organized, several of the eight churches had statements of belief, and as new churches were formed, an average of one a year, Conference was often asked to review their statements of faith. Thus it was the growth of the church, new leaders and new members from different backgrounds, that caused the Conference to appoint a com-

mittee to draft its first “expose’ of the doctrinal sentiments of the denomination” in 1835 as a safeguard against possible errors. The expose’ was “not adopted as having any binding force in itself, but simply as an exhibition of the views generally held by the denomination.” The second *Expose’* was adopted in 1880 at the peak of growth for American Seventh Day Baptists with the westward frontier movement and the opening of overseas missions.

Over 50 years later the denomination had been through the intense theological conflicts of the 1920s (fundamentalist-modernist controversy). A study in *The Helping Hand* devoted to the *Expose’* gave impetus to revision which produced the new *Statement of Belief* adopted in 1937. Members of the committee to draft it represented moderate as well as “liberal” and “conservative” viewpoints. Wide response was sought from lay members and theological students. Thus a key purpose was to help affirm and preserve denominational unity through a statement of “views generally held by Seventh Day Baptists.”

A study guide prepared for use with the 1937 Statement, emphasized that the effort to enrich and clarify it would make it “more available for religious nurture, missionary and evangelistic purposes, Sabbath publicity....”⁷³

In the continuing effort to simply, clarify, verify anew the core of the Christian faith for new generations of believers, the General Conference again revised the Statement in 1987 and the World Federation created its own Statement in 1991. Both were responding to increasing diversity of religious life in an expanding global context.

A Faith for Today

In the early 1960s, a period of social and political unrest in America, this writer was a college student struggling, as most young adults do, with what to keep and what to discard of the faith of her fathers. The local church offered a study of Seventh Day Baptist beliefs in *The Helping Hand* (April-June 1960). I still have that copy, heavily marked and annotated during that three-month study.

I remember with grateful reverence, nearly 40 years later, several teachers of those weekly classes. I can remember no specifics of what each believed, but how each encouraged right handling of Scripture, openness to the Spirit’s guidance, reverence for the church’s long faith experience, healthy discussion within the community of faith. These helped me clarify my beliefs which give my life meaning.

A recent study of six Protestant denominations (including

Baptists) showed that many satisfied church members hold beliefs which seem to be in conflict with traditional Christian beliefs. Respondents to the study said that the truths of Christianity are revealed in the Bible and through direct involvement of God in the world, but one-third also believed that “all spiritual truth and wisdom is within me” and “an individual should arrive at his or her own beliefs independent of any church.”⁴

The extreme individualism of American culture continues to erode acceptance of any corporate expression of “common belief.” What historian Winthrop Hudson identified as the intense tension between individual freedom and corporate unity can challenge not only the use of but the very existence of a denominational Statement of Belief. Yet others contend that Baptists seem to prove the Christian church can live and grow, based not upon creed or highly articulated ecclesiastical organization, but on the power of the Spirit itself.⁵

¹Clarence C. Goen, “Church History is My Vocation,” *American Baptist Quarterly*, 10:4 (Dec. 1991, p. 311).

²The Newport Church Covenant and later references to development of the denominational Statement of Belief are documented in Don A. Sanford’s, *A Choosing People: The History of Seventh Day Baptists*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992, p. 99.

³*Seventh Day Baptist Beliefs: A Manual for Study*. Janesville, Wisconsin: Ameri-

can Sabbath Tract Society, 1941; reprint 1983.

⁴Study reported in Winthrop S. Hudson’s *Religion in America*, 6th ed., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999, p. 420.

⁵Daniel Day Lewis’ “The Mystery of the Baptists” reported in Winthrop Hudson, *Baptists in Transition*, Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979, p. 16.

Questions for Discussion

1. What part does the Bible play in the formation of Christian belief statements? Most churches claim that their beliefs are based on Scripture; how then do we account for the differences?
2. Why is “liberty of thought under the guidance of the Holy Spirit” considered so “essential to Christian belief and practice”? What is the danger in too much “individual freedom”?
3. What are the purposes served by a statement of belief? Seventh Day Baptists claim to have no binding creed as a test of membership. Why was it developed historically? What are its uses today?
4. How does the tension between individualism and church authority affect the process of developing the Statement of Belief?
5. How did you personally arrive at your Christian beliefs?

God—The Father

Stephen Osborn

We believe in one God, infinite and perfect, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe who exists eternally in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and desires to share His love in a personal relationship with everyone.

We believe in God the Father, who is sovereign over all, and is loving and just as He forgives the repentant and condemns the unrepentant.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Sunday — 1 Corinthians 8:4-6

Father, with so many others vying for my devotion, I must acknowledge and recognize that You are the only true God, Creator of everything. All that I have...all that I see... all that is...comes from you. In that sense, You are the father of the universe and yet You have called one so insignificant as myself to be Your child. Amazing!

Monday — Ephesians 4:4-6

Father, the word “all” really describes much about You: all powerful, all knowing, all wise, all loving, all encompassing. I tend, sometimes, to think of myself as being pretty important until I stop and think of You. I exalt You as the sovereign Master, in control of the entire universe.

Tuesday — Ezekiel 33:10-20

Father, if I were You I would revel in punishing evil people who had sinned so greatly against me. Praise You for Your tender mercy, Your compassion, Your grace and Your patience. Help me never to take advantage of your wondrous gift of forgiveness.

Wednesday — 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8

Father, as injustice swells all around me, I take comfort in the shelter of Your justice. It seems so often that people who do not pay any heed to the rules, who use and abuse others in order to get

ahead, who do not fear You are the ones who get ahead in this world. I thank You for defending Your holiness and vindicating Your children by judging and punishing every form of evil and sin.

Thursday — John 5:24

Father, Your beautiful plan of redemption undeniably proves Your love for mankind. Knowing that my sins will never be held against me and that You have already rescued me from death and granted me eternal life overwhelms me with gratefulness and humility. I can do nothing to earn it and cannot even begin to repay You for this remarkable act of grace. Thank You!

Friday — John 3:16-18

Father, You paid the highest price possible, the life of Your one and only Son, to purchase my miserable life. And I know this was no accident, for this was Your plan from the very beginning of time. Only an all-loving Father would create a people knowing that we would reject You and rebel against You and that You would have to provide for our redemption and restoration. Thank You for loving us that much.

Sabbath — Romans 8:14-17

Father, I am overjoyed to be considered a part of Your family. You care for me, provide for me, protect me and nurture me in ways that no earthly father ever could. The privilege of being called Your child and the knowledge of the inheritance which You have promised me give me confidence to strive to live boldly a life that honors You.

The Testimony from Scripture

We are in good company in calling the first person of the Godhead “Father.” For it was Jesus’ favorite title for God (see John 5:17-24 for an example) and also the way he taught his disciples to address God when they prayed (Matt. 6:9). “Father” suggested far too great a familiarity to be used comfortably with a Jewish concept of God. But the title seems quite natural in the context of Christian theology. Jesus was, after all, called God’s Son (John 3:16), and we who have believed on Jesus Christ for salvation have become God’s children through adoption (Eph. 1:4-6; Rom. 8:14-17).

The Father’s primary function within the Godhead as it relates to the world seems to be in planning, implementing and sustaining actions that are carried out by God the Son and/or the Holy Spirit (Creation and Redemption are two important examples). The Father sent the Son into the world (John 3:17-18) and has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in all believers (John 14:16). Because of this, we tend to see the Father as the head of the three persons of God, even though all three are equal and inseparable.

In essence, God “Fathered” all of Creation—Heaven and Earth—through His creative plan and power. And so He naturally

and rightly displays sovereignty over everything that exists (1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6). The Father watches over us, His children, working in our best interest according to His sovereign plan (Rom. 8:28). In the same way that children (in a perfect world) live under the authority of their earthly father, who gave them life, everything that has life and breath must submit (voluntarily or involuntarily) to its Creator-Father.

Our Heavenly Father is just (2 Thes. 1:6-8). This means He always does what is right. His justice, combined with His holiness, demands that He judge and punish sin. Because God is holy and perfect, no sin abides in Him. Nor can He tolerate sin’s existence in His holy presence. If He did, he would cease to be holy and subsequently would cease to be God. So the Father continues to mete out the just penalty for sin—death (Rom. 6:23).

However, because He deeply loves humanity, the Father takes no pleasure in this condemnation. He would much rather see men and women repent and turn from their wicked ways (Ezek. 33:11). His desire is for all of His creatures to be reconciled to Him and enjoy the right relationship for which He created them. His love compelled Him to provide a way that He

could forgive man's sins. In order to balance His justice with His deep love for mankind, the Father designed the plan of redemption by which His justice is satisfied, His holiness kept intact and loving forgiveness bestowed upon repentant sinners (John 5:24; 3:16-18).

The Testimony from History

Throughout history theologians and laymen alike have struggled with fitting the concepts of this Statement together in the nature of God the Father. On the one hand, we say that the Father is loving and forgiving, and on the other, we state that He is just and condemning of sin. For many this creates an apparent contradiction. They might ask, "How could a loving Father send people to hell?"

The same confusion arises when people begin to compare and contrast the ways in which God interacts with humanity in the Old and New Testaments. The harsh, strict, and sometimes even angry God in the Old Testament does not seem to fit with the tender, gracious and loving God portrayed in the New. The former is pictured repeatedly punishing Israel for her shortcomings and threatening the death penalty for all who would not comply to His morality. The latter made the ultimate sacri-

fice to provide an opportunity for His people to be forgiven and made right with Him.

Varied responses have been utilized in an attempt to either explain away or accept this situation. One who went to the extreme on the denial end was Marcion of Pontus, who made a complete distinction between the two. He called God in the Old Testament the "demiurge" and credited Him with creating the world and being the God of the Jews. "Savior God" was his title for God in the New Testament. He saw this as the Christian God, full of love and mercy, whose kingdom was spiritual rather than material. Of course the distinction is artificial, and as a result, Marcion was deemed to be a heretic.¹

During the Reformation, Martin Luther's understanding of God as a loving Father who wanted to relate to each of us personally caused him to reject the concept of intermediaries through which one must go to gain access to God. He believed that, through Christ, all Christians have been granted the freedom to approach God on their own behalf. We would expect this from a God who wants us to call Him, "Father."

Of course, no real contradiction is posed by our Father God when He displays both love

and justice. They are both part of His character and must be carried out for God to be God. He cannot deny any part of His character without forfeiting His deity. Because of His holiness, God cannot tolerate sin. Because of His justice, God must punish all sin equally. However, because of His great love, God has chosen to allow the punishment for the sins of the repentant to fall upon His own Son, Jesus Christ.

A Faith for Today

Good fathers seem to be a dying breed, headed for extinction. Divorce, desertion, addiction, abuse and just plain laziness have left many children in this day and age either lacking a quality father figure or hating every image the word “father” brings to mind. This has left some confused as to their relationship with God the Father. I have even heard some say, “If God is like my real father, I do not want anything to do with Him.” Scripture makes it clear that Christians are God’s adopted children (Eph. 1:4-6; Rom. 8:14-17). Within our Father-child relationship with Him lies a great deal of intimacy, authority and responsibility with which we must come to grips if we are to relate to the Father and live in the world in the ways which He desires.

It seems unfortunate that a rash of irresponsibility among

imperfect men has diminished, for many people, the intimacy inherent in the father-child relationship. A special bond should form between father and child. Paul encourages this level of intimacy with God the Father when He says that we call God, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15). “Abba,” an affectionate Aramaic title, goes beyond our closest equivalents, “Daddy” or “Papa”. With it we envision the flood of emotions that rise up in the heart of a child racing across the airport terminal to greet her father returning from a long trip. “It is a personal term reflecting trust, dependence, intimacy, and love. Once we were sinners living in fear; now we are sons in the care of our Heavenly Father. Once we were strangers; now we are intimate friends. Our adoption means that we can come into God’s majestic presence and say, Daddy.”²

Along with the intimacy of a restored relationship with God the Father comes the authority with which He empowers His children. Paul calls us “...heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ,” (Rom. 8:17, NIV). As co-heirs, we gain the same inheritance from the Father that the Son, Jesus Christ, has. That includes the restoration of the authority to rule the earth with which He created us. This authority is not based on our own greatness or

power, but rather solely on our relationship with God the Father, the source of power and authority. Through this authority, we are called to act as God's witnesses (Acts 1:8) and ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20).

With authority, comes great responsibility to live in a manner that honors God and represents Him well to the world. In the same way that many of us have high performance expectations for our own children, God the Father has high expectations of excellent living for His children. After all, He has called us to "[b]e perfect...as [our] heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). This does not mean that He expects sinless lives from weak people like ourselves who are completely incapable, without His help, of living up to His standards. It does mean that God's children seek to know His will and strive to do it with all their heart, mind, soul and strength.

¹Don A. Sanford, "Seventh Day Baptist Beliefs," in *The Helping Hand*. (Alfred, New York: Seventh Day Baptist Board of Christian Education, 1983), 12.

²John MacArthur, Jr., *God: Coming Face to Face with His Majesty*. Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1993), 127.

Questions for Discussion

1. What image does the word "father" bring to your mind?
Do you have certain feelings or emotions (positive or negative) attached to your concept of fatherhood?
2. What is the role of God the Father within the Trinity?
3. What are the benefits of having God as our Father?
4. What does "sovereignty" mean as it relates to God and His governing of the events of the universe?
5. Is it possible for God to be completely loving and completely just?
6. If God can do anything, why doesn't He simply forgive all sin?
7. How will your life change as you come to a fuller understanding of the Fatherhood of God?

God—The Son

Scott Hausrath

We believe in one God, infinite and perfect, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe who exists eternally in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and desires to share His love in a personal relationship with everyone.

We believe in God the Son, who became incarnate in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. He gave Himself on the cross as the complete and final sacrifice for sin. As our Risen Lord, He is the mediator between God the Father and mankind.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Sunday — John 1:34

Jesus, Son of God, my Creator, my Redeemer, my Lord, my Savior—I too, like John, have seen you. How can I put into words your beauty? And yet I must, for I too, like John, testify that you are the Son of God. Today may my words and my actions testify that I have seen you and that I know you.

Monday — John 1:14-18

Jesus, Son of God, Word of God, God the One and Only—You came before me; you will come after me; may you come through me today. You came full of grace and truth. I cling to your grace—I bow down to your truth. As you have made the Father known, so today may I make you known.

Tuesday — Hebrews 1:3

Jesus, Son of God, Radiator of God's glory, Representative of God's being—You performed the work that purified me and you radiate God's mercy. You sustain every cell of my body through your powerful word. You represent God's caretaking. I bow down to look up to your throne in heaven. I worship you, Son of God.

Wednesday — Hebrews 10:10-14; 1 John 2:1-2

Jesus, Son of God, Atoning Sacrifice, Once-and-for-all Sacrifice, Righteous One—You have made me holy and perfect forever.

Today may I submit to your leading on this path of holiness. You speak to the Father in my defense. Today may I speak to others in your defense.

Thursday — 1 Corinthians 15:20-21; Romans 1:3-4

Jesus, Son of God, Descendant of David, Resurrected Lord—How is it that God was born to a human mother? And yet you were. How is it that God was raised in human flesh? And yet you have been. How is it that God understands from experience my human frailty? And yet you do. I am not alone, for the God who created me is the God who died for me, is the God who lives with me, is the God who will raise me.

Friday — 1 Timothy 2:5-6; John 14:6-7

Jesus, Son of God, Mediator, Ransom, the Way, the Truth, the Life—You came not to block the way but to be the way to God for me. What motivated you not only to pay the price for my misdeeds, but also to be the price? Today I bend my knee before you, asking you to lead me in your way. Your truth is what I seek. Your life is what I need. May I find myself in you this day.

Sabbath — 1 John 3:16; 1 Peter 2:24

Jesus, Son of God, Bearer of my sins, Architect of real love—In laying yourself down, you lifted me up. Through your injuries I am restored. I no longer need to carry my sins because you bore them for me. You took them away. I am now dead to sin; I can live for righteousness. May I make that choice today as I invest myself in your people. Today may I model your love: may I lay myself down to lift others up.

The Testimony from Scripture

It is natural to divide the Gospel into three foundational statements: 1) Jesus Christ was born; 2) He died for our sins; 3) He was raised from the dead. The Seventh Day Baptist Statement of Belief on God the Son is itself divided into three sentences, each affirming one of these foundational Gospel statements.

“We believe in God the Son, who became incarnate in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.” To become incarnate means to take on flesh. Specifically, by being born to a human mother, the Son of God, already possessing the nature of deity, took on an additional nature, that of humanity. John 1:1-2 affirms Christ’s divine nature, and John 1:14 affirms His human nature.

Though Christ took on the nature of humanity, he did not take on the nature of sin, because His incarnation was achieved through a virgin birth, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. Moreover, Matthew 1:22-23 affirms that Jesus is this prophecy’s fulfillment.

“He gave Himself on the cross as the complete and final sacrifice for sin.” The death of Jesus Christ is significant for many reasons. First, it was a substitutionary death, as noted in 1 Peter 2:24. He died in the place of sinful humans. Second,

Christ’s sacrifice was complete because it provided propitiation: it satisfied God’s requirements of righteousness and holiness (Rom. 3:25).

Additionally, Christ’s death effected redemption and reconciliation for us. Romans 6 describes how our union with Christ’s death achieves our redemption from sin, so that we may live for righteousness. Our reconciliation means that we who were formerly at war with God are now at peace with Him (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:19-20; 2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Finally, the death of Jesus Christ has resulted in both the forgiveness of our sins (Eph. 1:7), and our justification (Rom. 5:8-9). God has justified us by applying Christ’s righteousness to our lives.

“As our Risen Lord, He is the mediator between God the Father and mankind.” A crucial result of Christ’s resurrection was its validation of Jesus’ sonship (Rom. 1:4). The resurrection also redeemed the Christian faith from futility (1 Cor. 15:17). Our faith is in a God who has the power to defeat even death. We bow our knee not to a dead Savior, but rather to one who is alive.

After the resurrection came Christ’s ascension, which enabled Him to send the Holy Spirit down

to us (John 16:7). When he ascended into heaven, Christ also took on the role of mediator between God the Father and mankind. Jesus Christ, both fully human and fully divine, is now our high priest, sitting in heaven with the Father and interceding for us (Heb. 1:3; 10:12; John 1:18; 1 John 2:1).

The Testimony from History

The notion of Christ's incarnation, that a divine being took on human nature, has been the subject of much scrutiny and debate over the centuries. Christology is the term used to denote this study of God the Son.

Christology began with the period of the Apostolic Fathers, a select group of Church leaders who were alive during the lifetime of the New Testament apostles. The Christology of the Apostolic Fathers affirmed the basic truths about Jesus Christ. Ignatius, for example, upheld the deity of Christ, calling Him "Jesus Christ our God."¹ Ignatius also declared that Christ lives within His followers: "He Himself may be in us as our God."²

Clement declared that Jesus was "sent forth from God."³ Moreover Polycarp, in addition to affirming Christ's divinity, also upheld His humanity.

The Ancient Apologists followed the Apostolic Fathers. The Apologists were Gentile believ-

ers who answered the charges of those who were misunderstanding and slandering Christianity.

A major apologetic writing was *Epistle to Diognetus*, written in approximately 150 A.D. by an unknown author. This work further developed the ideas of Christology, asserting, for example, that Christ had been sent from God in order to be rejected by His chosen people and accepted by the Gentiles. This writing also described Christ as "a ransom for us, the holy for the lawless, the guileless for the evil, the just for the unjust, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal."⁴

The Fathers and the Apologists were very active, as the first few centuries of the Church saw much heresy regarding the nature of Christ. The Docetists in the first century, The Ebionites in the second century, the Arians and the Apollinarians in the fourth century, and the Eutychians in the fifth century all took their turns denying or reducing the human and/or divine nature of Christ.

This period also saw the convening of numerous church councils, for the purpose of refuting these different heresies. Familiar are the Council of Nicea in 325, the Council of Constantinople in 381, the Council of Ephesus in 431, and the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Space limits us from continuing this survey into the Medieval, Reformation, and Modern periods, but hopefully this short excursion into the Ancient period will give us cause to reflect on our amazing Savior.

It is the nature of Christ, the “hypostatic union,” which has been under such scrutiny for so many centuries. Paul Enns describes the hypostatic union: “The second person, the preincarnate Christ came and took to Himself a human nature and remains forever undiminished Deity and true humanity united in one person forever.”⁵

It is this Christ whom Seventh Day Baptists affirm as “God the Son, who became incarnate in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. He gave Himself on the cross as the complete and final sacrifice for sin. As our Risen Lord, He is the mediator between God the Father and mankind.”

A Faith for Today

“What difference does it make?” This is a question we should be asking ourselves about our belief in Jesus Christ. We believe that the Son of God has both a divine nature and a human nature. So what? What difference does it make in our everyday life?

Christ’s human nature makes a huge difference for us,

for it was Jesus’ humanity which made our salvation possible. Since the penalty for sin is death, and we who have committed sin are human, the penalty paid must be the death of a human (Heb. 2:14-17). The sins which we, in our human nature, have committed were paid for by Jesus Christ, who also possesses a human nature.

However, Christ’s divine nature also makes a huge difference for us, since it is another necessary ingredient for our salvation. Had Jesus not been divine, He would have possessed the sin nature, making Him a blemished sacrifice, unable to pay the penalty for our sins (Heb. 7:26-28).

Because of Christ’s dual nature, then, both His divinity and His humanity, we can live out every day with the confidence that we have been rescued from the penalty for our sins. We no longer need to fear death; we can focus on life. (For further assurance see 1 John 5:11-13.)

Another result of Christ’s human nature is that He was tempted to sin (even though He did not give in to the temptations). Jesus actually suffered because of His temptations (Heb. 2:18). Furthermore, because of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, we now have a friend who knows what it’s like

to endure temptation. We no longer need to feel alone in our battles against sin. We can trust that Jesus fully understands the struggles we face every day.

Moreover, because of Christ's divine nature, He is able to give us the power we need to defeat temptation. Is there a habit, an attitude, or an addiction which you are fighting every day of your life? Let Hebrews 7:23-25 remind you that you can win this daily battle, through the assistance of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Not only does He know your temptation, but He can also help you to defeat it. Call on your Lord and Savior throughout your day.

¹"The Epistles of Ignatius: Ephesians," 1, in Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1989, 410-415.

²"The Epistles of Ignatius: Magnesians," 12, in *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 410-415.

³"The First Epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians," 42, in *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 410-415.

⁴"Epistle to Diognetus," 9, in *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 410-415.

⁵Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1989, 227.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does it mean to "believe in" God the Son? Does our belief have any practical implications for everyday life?
2. What does the term "incarnate" mean? How did God become incarnate? What was the reason that God became incarnate? Could God have accomplished His mission in any other way than by becoming flesh?
3. Who was the historical Jesus Christ? What does it mean that Jesus Christ is our "Lord and Savior"?
4. Why did Jesus give Himself on the cross? What was His specific objective? During Jesus' death were there things occurring that man could not see?
5. What is sin? How was Jesus the "sacrifice" for sin? In what way was Jesus' sacrifice "complete and final"?
6. What difference does it make that Jesus Christ rose from the dead?
7. What is the specific mechanism for Jesus' mediation between God the Father and mankind?

God—The Holy Spirit

Kenneth B. Burdick

We believe in one God, infinite and perfect, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe who exists eternally in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and desires to share His love in a personal relationship with everyone.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who gives spiritual birth to believers, lives within them, and empowers them for witnessing and service. We believe the Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures, convicts of sin and instructs in righteousness.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Sunday — Psalm 139:1-12; Ezekiel 39:29

Oh LORD, my God, you are there wherever I am, personally and powerfully, in the person of your Spirit. Even if I wanted to run away from you, I could not do it, and you are always ready to guide me and hold me fast. How I rejoice in that knowledge, though I cannot completely comprehend it! The farthest place, the deepest darkness is made bright by the light of your presence.

Monday — Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

Father, thank you for the assurance from your word that I will always belong to you. From the day I first believed the Gospel, your Spirit has lived in my heart, testifying to me who I am in Christ. He is my guarantee that you will make me stand firm in Christ. Fill my heart with that assurance, today!

Tuesday — Galatians 5:16-26

Dear God, help me live by the Spirit and keep in step with him today. It's so easy to slide back into what I was before I received Christ. Though I've counted my sinful nature as crucified in him, its ways are still with me. Help me step away from them and into your love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Wednesday — Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

LORD, build me together with my brothers and sisters in Christ, that we might be a fitting temple for your Holy Spirit. Make our church a holy place because those who gather there in Jesus' name are joined together in his love and patience, kindness and truth. Let me never speak or act so as to cause damage to your church and desecrate the temple you have made us.

Thursday — Ephesians 4:1-6, 29-32

Father, give me insight into what I might do to help keep the unity your Spirit has given us in our church through the bond of peace. Help me evaluate the things I've said and bring them into line with what will build others up and benefit them. Forgive me if I have grieved your Spirit by what I've done or said.

Friday — 1 Corinthians 6:18-20; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 5:15-18

My God, I desire to always honor you with my body. For like your church, my body also is a temple of the Holy Spirit. I am not my own. I admit it. I am yours. In the Holy Spirit's power, enable me to purify myself from everything that contaminates body and spirit. Keep on filling me with the Spirit's power and presence.

Sabbath — Genesis 1:1-2; Psalm 104:24, 30

Heavenly Father, your mighty works of Creation testify to me that you indeed are God! Let them remind me also to honor the divinity of your Holy Spirit. It was he who hovered over the waters, and when you send him, your creatures are created. Praise Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

The Testimony from Scripture

From Genesis (Gen. 1:2) to Revelation (Rev. 22:17), Scripture testifies to the existence and activities of the Holy Spirit, though he is so identified only twice in the Old Testament (Psa. 51:11, Isa. 63:10-11). That he is God in the same sense as the Father and Son can be seen from his divine attributes and activities. He is eternal (Heb. 9:14) and omnipresent (Psa. 139:7). He joined with the Father (1 Cor. 8:6) and the Son (Col. 1:16) in creating the universe (Gen. 1:2; Psa. 104:30), an undivided action of the one true God, carried out coequally by the three persons of God. In Acts 5, lying “to the Holy Spirit” (v. 3) is lying “to God” (v. 4).

But the Holy Spirit is not just the Father in disguise. Rather, he is sent from the Father (John 14:26), who knows his mind and receives his intercession for the saints (Rom. 8:27). Jesus speaks of him as “another Counselor” (John 14:16), to indicate the Spirit is a distinct person from himself. The Spirit is not an impersonal force because he can be grieved (Isa. 63:11; Eph. 4:30); we can know his fellowship (2 Cor. 13:14); and he speaks (Acts 28:25) and teaches (John 14:26).

Anyone who receives Christ is, at that moment, sealed with (Eph. 4:30) and baptized by (1

Cor. 12:13) the Holy Spirit, by whom all believers are “born again” (John 3:5-8). The Spirit lives within believers (John 14:17), and it is impossible to belong to Christ and not have the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). But effective service for Christ requires dependence upon the Spirit (lit. “keep on being filled with the Spirit,” Eph. 5:18), and his witness makes ours effective (John 15:26-27).

The New Testament term *Comforter* (Counselor, Helper) has a broad meaning, including the ideas that the Spirit is called alongside us to be our counsel for the defense, encourager, helper, interceder, teacher and guide. He convicts unbelievers of their sin, the judgment it deserves, and the saving righteousness of Christ (John 16:7-11). The Spirit’s ministry through human authors (John 14:26; 16:12-16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21) insured that the Scriptures they produced were inspired (“God-breathed,” 2 Tim. 3:16).

The Testimony from History

Scripture shows the Holy Spirit to be God to the same extent as the Father and the Son, while he is also distinct from both of them. So it would be false to say that such ideas about the Spirit didn’t come into existence until the controversies in

the church during the second through the fourth centuries, when the doctrine of the Trinity was formulated. It is more accurate to say that a deeper understanding of these truths was gained during that period, as a result of defending them against new errors.

A.H. Lewis mentions Seventh Day Baptist beliefs about the Spirit as follows: "As a branch of the Baptist family, they have been in harmony with the Baptists concerning the divinity of Christ, the personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit, the immaterial nature and the immortality of the human soul, and other fundamental doctrines of Christianity."¹

Interestingly, no mention is made of "the personality and divinity" of the Spirit in the 1880 statement of faith current when Lewis wrote. The Spirit's "office" (i.e. work) is described, but nothing at all is said about his nature. The previous statement (1833/52) had affirmed, "that there is a union existing between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and that they are equally divine and equally entitled to our adoration."

This reveals two trends among Seventh Day Baptists: 1) when we agree with other Christians about "fundamental doctrines," we have often not found it necessary to address them in

detail in a statement of beliefs; 2) since 1852, we have been more inclined to highlight the "work" of the Holy Spirit than his "nature". These trends reflect a reluctance to use complex theological language to express our beliefs and a desire to avoid committing the denomination in the theological controversies of the day. Even in those about the work of the Spirit, such as that raised by the twentieth century Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, we have avoided committing the denomination. Whether refusing to address such issues will prove wise or short-sighted is yet to be seen.

A Faith for Today

What the Holy Spirit means to me immediately and personally as a believer is that my conversion was not just a change of attitude or an act of self-improvement. It was a genuine miracle of God, by which my sinful, condemned self was born again as a new creation (John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:17). This gives me great assurance (Rom. 8:16) of my salvation, since if it was not by my own efforts that I was saved (Titus 3:5), neither is it by them that I remain saved (Gal. 3:2-3; 1 Peter 1:5).

Second, the Holy Spirit's work in my life means that my efforts toward holiness are backed up by God's power.

Though I will never attain sinless perfection (Phil. 3:12; 1 John 1:8), the Spirit is active in me to take me the next step in the process of sanctification (2 Thes. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2; Rom. 8:11-13). It is his work to strengthen me so that Christ lives in me (Eph. 3:16-17).

Third, the fact I possess at least one “gift” of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11) means I have a divinely empowered ministry to fulfill in building up the church (1 Cor. 14:12, 26; Eph. 4:12). It is “in the church” (1 Cor. 12:28) that I find the context for using this gift. It is for building up, not myself, but others (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10).

Fourth, the indwelling of the Spirit calls for yielding myself to God in every aspect of my life. I am to “live by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16) and “pray in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18) and, be “led by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:14). When doing so, I need not conform to the man-made rituals and formulas being pushed today. Some of them would have me treat the Spirit as if he were a force to be “unleashed” or manipulated to do my will. Neither should I confuse prayer in the Spirit with some modern notion of speaking in tongues.

To live by the Spirit is to set my mind on what the Spirit desires (Rom. 8:5), and be guided

by that. To pray in the Spirit is to do the same in prayer, and to pray with dependence upon him to “intercede” for me (Rom. 8:27) and lead me. I will live with the “sword” of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) in hand—being guided by both the Spirit and the word.

¹*Seventh-Day Baptist Hand Book*, 1896, p. 34.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does Jesus’ characterization of the Holy Spirit as “another Counselor” (John 14:16) tell us about his nature? For instance, is this an appropriate title for an impersonal force? Would Jesus have used the word “another” if the Son and the Holy Spirit were really just the same person (i.e., the Father), appearing differently to us? What other Scriptural evidence supports your conclusions about the nature of the Holy Spirit?
2. Why is it appropriate to speak of the Spirit as “God the Holy Spirit”? (See Acts 5:3-4; Heb. 9:14; Ps. 139:7; Ps. 104:30.)
3. What answer would you give to the person who says, “I don’t need to know what Scripture says about things since the Holy Spirit speaks to me directly”? Study the

following before giving your response: 1 Cor. 4:6; Matt. 22:29; Eph. 6:17; 2 Tim. 2:15 & 3:16-17; Acts 17:11; Acts 20:30-32.

4. What is power received from the Holy Spirit for? (See Acts 1:8 & 4:33; Eph. 3:16-17; Luke 4:1-2; Rom. 15:13; Col. 1:11.)
5. How can believers guard against doing things in the flesh but attributing them to the Spirit?
6. According to 2 Timothy 3:16, is inspiration a quality of the human writers of Scripture or of Scripture itself? What is implied about Scripture, to say it was “God breathed” (NIV—i.e., “breathed out by God,” as if spoken by him)?
7. Because the Spirit is a person, it is possible to pray to him; however, there is not one example of this in Scripture. Though believers experience a closeness to the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14), which person is normally addressed in prayer? (See Matt. 6:9.)
8. Does the Holy Spirit live in everyone, or just in believers (John 3:5-8; John 14:17; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Rom. 8:9-10, 14-16)?

The Bible

Andrew J. Camenga

We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is our final authority in matters of faith and practice. We believe that Jesus Christ, in His life and teachings as recorded in the Bible, is the supreme interpreter of God's will for mankind.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Study Scriptures —

2 Peter 3:1-2; Psalm 119:105

Sunday — 2 Peter 1:19-21

Savior, we thank you for giving us a word that shines like a light in the darkness. Help us to disengage from the opinions and interpretation that we have created. Allow your Holy Spirit to guide our interpretation of Scripture and lead us to your will.

Monday — Romans 3:1-2

Lord, you entrusted Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with your covenant. You chose Moses and the people of Israel to guard and keep your oracles. We praise you for keeping these words safe and delivering them to us through your chosen messengers.

Tuesday — 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Master, we do not always turn to you for answers to the problems of life. Yet, you have given a reliable source of guidance. Allow us to study your Scriptures anew. Encourage us to submit ourselves to the teaching and correction that You have provided.

Wednesday — Matthew 5:17-19; Isaiah 55:10-11

God, you have said that your word always accomplishes the goal you set for it. We know that you gave the law and prophets to provide guidance to your people. Allow us to fully appreciate the endurance of your word.

Thursday — 2 Peter 3:15-16

Father, it is not always easy to understand the writing you have prepared for us. There are people in the world who work to distort the truth that you have presented. Guard our hearts and our minds by your spirit that we may represent your will to the world.

Friday — John 20:30-31

Author of Salvation, your plan has been laid before our eyes in detail. The work of your hands has been described for a purpose. Do not let us become so absorbed in the specific details of your word that we neglect its purpose. Help us to believe.

Sabbath — Hebrews 1:1-2

Almighty God, you break into our world and disclose yourself. You touch and guide our history. You spoke to us through the prophets of old. You have revealed yourself in the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. Help us to see your glory, understand your goal, and walk in the righteousness of your Son.

The Testimony from Scripture

The introduction to our Statement of Belief says that we consider liberty of thought and freedom of conscience to be crucial in seeking to determine the will of God. Yet, we do not proclaim that every understanding is of equal value. In fact, we modify the idea of liberty of thought by placing it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The first scripture listed in our statement on the Bible supports this modification.

The prophecy of Scripture is not a matter of personal interpretation (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The reason for this is that humans did not invent the material. Instead, God, working through the Holy Spirit, caused these things to be written. Peter followed this description of prophecy with a warning about those who create false teaching. He warned his readers about the consequences of speaking false words, Peter called them to heed the words of God and the command of Christ as repeated by the apostles (2 Pet. 3:1-2). Later, Peter described the letters of Paul as part of Scripture. He also stated that people find Paul's work hard to understand and distort his teaching (3:15-16).

Scripture acknowledges that humans can distort its intended meaning. Distortion is not the only outcome of our work

with the texts. The Bible also states that we can learn things of significant value. It encourages us to spend considerable time learning what the texts have to say. Paul encouraged Timothy to remember what he had learned in the Scriptures. He further told him that Scripture is valuable for teaching and training. In fact, Scripture is crucial to producing people who are ready to do the good works that God has prepared (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

This production of people ready to do good works is not the only function of Scripture. Part of the function is to bring blessing on those who work with the Scripture frequently (Ps. 1). Part of the function is to provide daily guidance for our travel on earth (Ps. 119:105). A major function of Scripture is to produce belief that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:31). It brings those who believe into a relationship with Jesus that produces life in His name.

God chose to reveal Himself to humanity in a variety of ways. He used creation (Ps. 19). He spoke directly to people (Genesis 15:13). The author of Hebrews wrote of this kind of revelation. He then established Jesus as a greater revelation. The author described Jesus as "the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His na-

ture" (1:3, NASB). As the exact representation of the nature of God, we can be assured that the way Jesus worked with Scripture is in accord with the will of God. It is for that reason we declare the example of Christ as recorded in the Bible as the standard by which all other interpretation of God's will is measured.

The Testimony from History

The Bible is a collection of documents representing a long period and gathered by people of faith to serve as a guide for their community. It contains many forms of written material: poetry, prose, narrative, genealogy, and parable. The original authors wrote in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. This book describes the action of God and God's people through history. We call it our final authority in matters of faith and practice.

This understanding of the final authority of Scripture is not universally shared among those who call themselves Christian. The Protestant movement of the 1500s claimed to rely only on Scripture for matters of doctrine. In response, the Roman Catholic Council of Trent declared, in effect, that both "Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence."¹ Other groups have worked with

ways of giving reason, experience, tradition, and the Bible varying degrees of related authority.

In the last hundred years, groups have asked a question that strikes more closely at the core of Biblical authority. They have asked, "Can the Bible be trusted?" This question has been answered in three basic ways: no, partially, and yes. If the Bible cannot be trusted, then a belief in Jesus as the Savior of humanity is misplaced. For that reason, only a few within the Christian movement have proclaimed that the Bible is not trustworthy.

Those who proclaim the Bible is partially trustworthy typically make a distinction between the "central saving message of Scripture and all the difficult surrounding material that supports the message."² This approach assumes that the separation between God and humanity is so great that He must use methods that introduce error in communication. However, they contend that errors can exist in the text without destroying its ability to communicate salvation. From this perspective, in matters of salvation the Bible can be trusted. In all other matters, the Bible may or may not be reliable.

Among those who proclaim that the Bible can be trusted, two groups emerge. One group

states that the Bible is fully true in matters of history, science, geography, math, and salvation. This group struggles with every text in the Bible and works to make sure that every statement fits in a logical and precise framework. For example, the description in 2 Chronicles 4:2 of a round tank of bronze (TEV) that does not produce the known value of π is a problem that must be answered. They explain in great detail the construction of the tank and demonstrate how this produces an accurate value for π .

The other group “holds that the Bible is completely true. While the Bible does not primarily aim to give scientific and historical data, such scientific and historical assertions as it does make are fully true.”⁶ This position allows an author to write things as they seem to the eye and to use a variety of literary forms to communicate with the reader.

Many years separate us from the events that surround the life of Jesus of Nazareth. We did not see him. Our parents did not see him. To claim that God revealed in Jesus Christ is the core of our faith makes some people laugh. It makes others question how we know that our proclamation of Jesus, our confession of faith, is trustworthy.

Our answer is that God provided a written record of His activity with humans. That written record is the Bible. In matters of faith and practice there is no greater authority.

A Faith for Today

Several years ago a breakfast cereal manufacturer ran an advertising campaign that asked customers to “Try it again—for the first time.” They recognized that humans tend to become comfortable, even complacent, with decisions made long ago. This ad tried to break the complacency in order to expand their market.

The tendency that the company noticed is not limited to our choice of breakfast food. It is one that touches most areas of our life. People worry about desensitization to violence. We can become so familiar with a setting that we no longer notice minor changes. We can discover answers to questions and accept them without further investigation.

What is true in other areas of life is true in our approach to the Bible. The “old, old story” is one that we can repeat verbatim without hearing a word of what is said. We overlook the humor in the image of a man with a log hanging out of his face trying to dislodge a speck of dust in the

eye of someone else. We ignore the children's stories of the Old Testament and so fail to recognize and deal with the bloodletting that often accompanied these heroic tales. It is easy to read and answer questions with formulas learned long ago.

We believe that the Bible is our final authority in matters of faith and practice. We also believe that Scripture equips Christians to be prepared for every good work. For the equipping to take place and the authority to be exercised, we must allow our lives to be touched continually by God's Word. I am very much aware that a challenge to daily Bible study is something we hear often. We hear it often because it is a good challenge.

However, the challenge we have today is more than redoubling our efforts to plow through the Biblical text. The challenge for today is to take a step back from the answers we already have. It is to approach the scriptures as though we do not already know it all. Ask a new question. Force yourself to paraphrase a passage. Diagram a sentence. Summarize a chapter in poetry. Use these methods or try something else. In other words, "Read it again—for the first time."

¹*Catechism of the Catholic church*. New York: Image/Doubleday, 1955, 31.

²Jack B. Rogers and Donald B. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979, 461.

³Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985, 222.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the example of Christ function as a guide to the interpretation of God's will?
2. Are there matters of practice that the Bible does not discuss?
3. How do the commands of God to the people of Israel function in our lives?
4. Does all the Bible have equal value for determining our faith and practice?

Mankind

Eric Davis

We believe that mankind was created in the image of God and is therefore the noblest work of creation.

We believe that human beings have moral responsibility and are created to enjoy both divine and human fellowship as children of God.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Sunday — Genesis 1:26-27

What is an image? It is either a reflection or representation of an original object or person. We are told in Genesis that as human beings we have been created in God's image. As creatures, we are a reflection of the Creator. We must remember that we are the representatives of God and we are to respect one another as holders of the image of God.

Monday — Psalm 8:3-9

As creatures created in the image of God, we have been given a high place in the universe. God has made us only a little lower than the heavenly beings. We are higher than the animal kingdom. We are much more than a randomly collected blob of cells. We are very special to Him. He has crowned us with glory and honor. He has made us rulers over the works of His creation.

Tuesday — Psalm 139:13-17

God himself put us together. He took special care in putting His creation together. Because He is involved with the intimate details of our creation, He knows us intimately. Each individual is precious to the Lord.

Wednesday — Micah 6:8

God has an expectation of the way people are to live. He has created humanity in His image, and we have an obligation to live up to that image. The Lord requires that we act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with God.

Thursday — Matthew 5:44-48

Jesus provided us with a way of knowing that we are the children of God. He said that we are sons of our Father in heaven if we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. He also called us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. These are difficult tasks to carry out, but these are the duties of God's children. We carry them out through the power of Christ in us.

Friday — John 1:12

Christians can have confidence of who they are in Christ. When we receive Christ we are given a new title. We have a special identity in Christ. We are told that all who receive Him become the children of God. We should not take a low view of ourselves. As Christians we are not worthless lumps of nothing. We know who our Father is, and that makes us special.

Sabbath — 1 John 1:3

As image-bearers and as children of God, we have two important connections. We have fellowship with each other and with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. The first connection is to God. We are joined to Him through accepting Jesus as our Lord. The second connection is to our fellow Christians. We must love and care for one another and share each other's burdens.

The Testimony from Scripture

The wording of our Statement of Belief about humanity comes straight out of scripture. Genesis 1:26-27 provides two key phrases to our statement that are worth commenting on. The first is "God created man," and the second is "in the image of God."

Our Statement of Belief affirms that we are indeed created. The universe did not come into being by happenstance. There was a Creator, God, who spoke everything into existence. Where there was void, He created order. Human beings were not simply a biological byproduct that came about by random chance. God planned out exactly what he would do. God made humans. The Bible teaches that God took special care to create humans. Genesis 2:7 describes the scene where God formed the first man out of the dust. An image is given of a loving and careful sculptor. Psalm 139:13 even goes so far as to say that He "knits" us together.

Because we are created, we know that we are creatures and not the Creator. As creatures, humans are distinct from the Creator. We do not presume to take His place. We are the noblest work of His creation, but we are still a long way off from being on the level of God. Humans can create many things out

of the materials that God has given us, but we have never been able to create something out of nothing. Only God the Creator can do that.

When God created humans, He did so in a special way that distinguished them from the rest of creation. When God made the first man and the first woman, He placed in them the "image of God." What does it mean to be created in God's image? Much has been made over what that might mean. It is a difficult concept to grasp, and many people have tried to give an interpretation of the phrase "image of God."

In the context of Genesis 1:26-27, two descriptions begin to explain what the image of God might be. When God said, "Let us make man in our image," He followed the decision with a mandate that humans will rule over the rest of creation. Humans were given charge over the seas, air, earth, and all the creatures that reside in those realms. It would appear from this context that to be created in the image of God means that we have a great responsibility for His creation. Just as God is the ultimate caretaker of creation, we who are in His image must be good stewards of what He has given to us.

There is a second description within the text that informs

our understanding of what it means to be created in the image of God. Genesis 1:27 (NIV) says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." It appears that it takes both male and female to complete the image of God.

While it may be difficult to pinpoint what being created in the image of God means, we can identify what the image of God does for us. When God decided to create humanity in His image, He proclaimed humans to be the noblest work of His creation. He gave humans the right to rule over creation. Psalm 8:5 (NIV) says that He gave humans a very high position, just "a little lower than the heavenly beings."

The Statement on Mankind goes on to affirm that we have a moral responsibility and we are to enjoy both divine and human fellowship. 1 John 1:3 states that we are to have fellowship with one another and with God. Micah 6:8 gives the purpose statement for humanity. God states His expectation of us very succinctly. "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (NIV). As humans and as children of God, we are to treat each other with justice. We must not take advantage of one another. We are to show mercy

to one another. As we fellowship together, we are to love and forgive one another. We are to bear each other's burdens. Finally we are to walk humbly with God. We do so by remembering our position. We are the creatures; He is the Creator. We are in His image, so we are special; but we are human, not God.

The Testimony from History

As I mentioned in the *Testimony from Scripture*, it is difficult to pinpoint what the phrase, "image of God" means. Over the centuries, many have tried to give different interpretations. Some people have said that "the image of God" refers to the moral responsibility that God has given to us. God as Creator has the power to choose, and He has also given this power to us. When we exercise our free will, we are displaying the image of God. Others have said that the image of God in us is our capacity to reason. God is a rational being who creates and thinks in an orderly way. As humans, we may not always act rationally, but we do have a capacity to reason things out and this reflects the image of God in us. Still others think the image has to do with the spirit within us. God is spirit, and He has created us with a spirit. Our spirit will live forever with the eternal God.

Whatever interpretation one takes about what the image of God means, we can probably agree that the image was tarnished by sin. As creatures we were already a poor reflection of the Creator. As sinners, that image is so distorted that it appears to be gone. Jesus Christ came to restore that image of God to humanity. He was the perfect human. He was without sin. When He died in our place, His blood cleansed us from our sins. With our sins washed away, the image of God begins to shine in us again.

A Faith for Today

Being created in the image of God is one of the many great truths of Scripture. But how should this theological concept impact our lives? There are at least three areas where the image of God ought to influence the way we live. The concept of being made in the image of God ought to affect the way we think about ourselves, the way we treat each other, and the way we use the world's resources.

First, knowing that we have been created in the image of God ought to impact the way we think about ourselves. Many Christians confuse humility with a negative self-image. They put themselves down thinking that is a mark of holiness. While it is true that we ought not to think more highly

of ourselves than of others, we must remember our position in Creation. Psalm 8:5 says God has placed us just a little lower than the angels and He has crowned us with glory and honor. We are important in His eyes. We are so special to God that He endowed us with His image. We should not think of ourselves as worthless creatures on the level of the animal kingdom. After the heavenly beings, we are above all God's creation.

Secondly, the knowledge that all humans are created in the image of God ought to affect the way we interact with one another. In Leviticus 19:18 (NIV) God told His people, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus repeated this command in Matthew 22:39 and said it was the second greatest commandment. We are to treat one another with respect because we each hold within us the image of God. When you encounter another human being, you are looking at someone who reflects the image of God. Thus the way we treat other humans affects the way we treat God. That is why 1 John 4:20 says, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar" (NIV). How can a person love God yet hate someone who carries within him or her the image of God?

Finally, the fact that humans have been created in the

image of God needs to direct the way we treat the rest of creation. According to Genesis 1:26, one of the characteristics of being created in the image of God means to be a ruler over God's creation. God gave humankind dominion over His creation. We who have been given the image of God must be godly caretakers of what God has entrusted to us. We must use the resources He has given to us, but we must also be careful not to waste those resources. We must not destroy that which the Creator has created. We need to take care of the environment and work to correct the mistakes we have made that pollute it. We show that we are good stewards of God's gifts by taking care of the earth and the creatures that live here. However, once again we must remember our position in the order of creation. As bearers of God's image, we are more important than the rest of creation. Animals and plants do not supersede humans. We have been given dominion over all that lives in the seas, air and land. Humans are not on the same level as the rest of creation. Nor are we on the level of God. We must keep our position in mind as we deal with God, ourselves, each other and the world around us.

Questions for Discussion

1. Genesis 1:26-27
How are human beings distinguished from the rest of creation? What responsibility does God give to them?
2. Psalm 8:3-9
As we look at the immensity and majesty of the universe, what negative attitude might we form of our selves?
3. Micah 6:8
What does God expect from people? How might we live out this expectation?
4. Matthew 5:44-48
How are we to treat other people? How does this let us know that we are children of God?
5. John 1:12
How does one receive the right to become a child of God?
6. 1 John 1:3
How do we have fellowship with one another? How do we have fellowship with God?

Sin and Salvation

Matthew G. Olson

We believe that sin is disobedience to God and failure to live according to His will. Because of sin all people have separated themselves from God. We believe that because we are sinners, we are in need of a Savior.

We believe that salvation from sin and death is the gift of God by redeeming love accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection, and is received only by repentance and faith in Him. We believe that all who repent of their sin and receive Christ as Savior will not be punished at the final judgment but enjoy eternal life.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Sunday — Romans 7:7-12

The Law makes us aware of sin, but it does not cause us to sin. Having been made conscious of our sin through the Law, the law of sin and death is put into motion. We may struggle to put the genie back into the bottle but find we cannot. The Law which was to result in life led to sin's deception and our death. Once we have been reconciled to God, however, that same Law which condemned us becomes our invaluable guide and friend.

Monday — Romans 7:13-25

The principle that evil is present within each of us is not that difficult to demonstrate: Paul makes it clear earlier in Romans that we have each one of us sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Though we may concur with God's law, the law of sin and death is hard at work within us, with the result that we end up practicing the very evil we do not wish. God has provided a way of escape through His Son, and for that we can rejoice.

Tuesday — Romans 8:1-11

Here Paul reveals to us a different law, which is the law of the Spirit. The Law could not save us because it had been made weak through the flesh, which is to say through our own weakness. But God's Son overcame the law of sin and death by dying in our place

on the cross. If we have had planted within us the faith to accept Christ's free offer of salvation, then, though we were dead in our sins, we are raised with Him to new life through His Spirit.

Wednesday — Romans 8:12-17

What a marvelous transformation is accomplished through the blood of Jesus Christ! We who were as good as dead have been brought back to life and have been adopted as God's own sons and daughters! Since God has done that for us, we are under obligation to live according to the Spirit. When we were in sin we were bound by that sin; now we are freed by the Spirit to walk in the Spirit.

Thursday — Romans 8:18-25

Creation itself was subjected to futility. How far-reaching are the effects of our sin! Even the world around us is suffering under a curse because of our actions. Thus the earth groans along with us for that day when we will be made new—for the day when our redemption will be complete and we will be made whole again. That is the hope of the earth, and it is our hope as well. What a joy it will be to be made perfect and to stand before God, holy and blameless. Until then, Paul charges us to persevere.

Friday — Romans 8:26-30

While we await the Day of the Lord, we struggle with our weakness. But we have been given the Holy Spirit, who helps us in our weakness. That is true in regard to what we do, what we think and what we say. At those times when we struggle to find the words to say, the Spirit speaks for us with groaning too deep for words. Even in our inability to articulate our needs, God causes all things to work together for our good and ensures that we who love God will be heard even if we cannot speak.

Sabbath — Romans 8:31-39

Although we were bound by sin, we have been set free through the grace of God and the gift of His Son. No one can condemn us. No one can separate us from God's love. Nothing can come between us and God. There was a time when we were far from God. But now we have been brought near and can never be taken away from Him. Instead, in all of these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? Praise be to God!

The Testimony from Scripture

If there is one thing today's passage is pretty clear about, it is that you and I have a big problem. Our problem is that we do things that displease God. The Bible calls that problem sin. Paul wanted those who read the book of Romans to understand that the problem of sin is a universal one and that it is a problem that you and I cannot solve on our own. It doesn't make any difference who we are or what nation we belong to. We are all guilty of breaking God's laws. We are all guilty of, as our statement of belief says, "failure to live according to His will." That is a big problem.

Fortunately for us, God has an even bigger solution. That solution involves the sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. The result of that is death and eternal damnation. But God, in His mercy, made it possible for Jesus Christ to pay our debt—to die in our place and, by the shedding of His blood, cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God's gift enables us to be justified before Him. God's gift makes it possible to come to God, to bridge the gap which exists between us and God. We had a big problem: sin had separated us from God. But God had an even bigger solution: through His Son's sacrifi-

cial death a bridge was built which makes it possible for us to return to Him.

It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we are led to avail ourselves of God's solution to our problem. You and I were trapped in our sin. There was nothing we could do to save ourselves. So God, in His infinite mercy, provided a way out. He planted in us the faith we would need to turn away from our sin and to turn to Him, trusting Him to save us rather than ourselves. God's righteousness demanded that we be held accountable for our sin. The law was God's way of holding us accountable. We were not able to keep the law because of our inherent sinfulness. Because we are not able to solve our own problem, Paul said, we had nowhere to turn but to God in order to find the solution for our problem.

The result of our turning to God in order to find the solution to the problem of sin is our redemption and eternal life with God. There is another result as well. In the last verse of Romans 3, Paul states that by our faith we "establish" the law. Our faith does not make the law void. Instead, it proves that the law is legally binding. Because of our sin, we were condemned. The law held us accountable for our actions. When we turned to God

in faith, the law did not lose its power to do that. God's law does not change. Sin must be accounted for. But the mechanism by which that is done has changed for us. It is our faith in Jesus' blood which settles our account, proving that it is only by faith that we can be saved and thus establishing the power of the law.

The Testimony from History

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor who lived and worked in Germany during the time of Hitler's reign. He was compelled by his conscience to join those who sought Hitler's overthrow. He was jailed for his efforts and, at the age of 39, was executed at the Flossenburg concentration camp. In life and in death, Dietrich Bonhoeffer inspired the faith of others and led countless people to consider God's claim on their lives. It might seem strange, then, to hear that this man who had given his life for his beliefs would have as one of the central themes of his writing the problem of sin and the cost involved in solving that problem.

In that regard, perhaps, Bonhoeffer was not unlike the apostle Paul. Like Bonhoeffer, Paul lived an exemplary life. If there was anyone who could claim to have "earned" salvation, it was Paul. Yet he was

painfully aware of how far from the mark he was. Paul could have insisted that he, more than anyone else, deserved to go to heaven. But through his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus, Paul came to see that he had failed utterly in his attempt to make himself righteous. When Jesus appeared to him, the folly of his life was laid bare. So Paul turned away from his attempt to win his salvation by works and accepted the grace God offered through Christ. That grace, Paul said, came at a terrible price: the death of Jesus, God's Son, on the cross.

Like the apostle Paul, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was well aware of the terrible price God paid to release him and everyone else who follows Christ from sin. He decried our tendency to cheapen grace by assuming that we somehow deserve to be saved or by thinking so little of the cost of sin that we do not strive to overcome it. It was the price of sin which led him to write *The Cost of Discipleship*, in which Bonhoeffer forcefully reminded his readers of the costly grace God has poured out upon us. The only proper response to such grace, he said, was to answer the call to discipleship with obedience.

Through the example of men like the apostle Paul and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we are re-

minded that God purchased our lives for a fearful price. It was no small thing for God to solve our problem with sin. Sometimes, I think, we forget that. We assume that God didn't mind so much. We forget how offensive and repulsive God finds sin. We think that what we do isn't so bad really, especially in comparison to those around us. But God doesn't measure sin by comparing us to others. He measures it by comparing us to Himself. Obviously we do not fare well in such a comparison. Given that, we must be careful to live in a way that acknowledges our own shortcoming and the wonderful grace of Jesus.

A Faith for Today

My story isn't much like the apostle Paul's or Dietrich Bonhoeffer's. I can hardly claim to have led an exemplary life. I was well aware of my shortcomings and had no illusions about my problem with sin. What I did not know was that God had provided a solution. How I came to know God's solution is the most important thing that has ever happened to me.

As I said, I knew that I was not the kind of person who deserved to go to heaven. In fact, I was pretty sure that I was not the kind of person God would be the least bit interested in. And when

certain choices I had made resulted in my becoming an outcast in school, I figured I was only getting what I deserved. It was at that moment that God led me to someone who already knew that no one "deserves" salvation. That person, Marty Pederson, went out of his way to help me discover that too.

By showing me kindness when no one else would, Marty led me to wonder what his motivation was. In talking with him, going to youth fellowship and to church with him, I discovered his motivation: love. God had loved Marty enough to die for him, and Marty believed that God loved me that much too. He knew that in spite of my condition God loved me enough to provide a solution. I knew I could never be good enough to solve my own problem. But unlike most of the people around me, Marty understood that although that was true, it did not mean that I was without hope.

Marty and his family and his pastor, David Taylor, all did their best to help me find the solution to my problem. Pastor Dave patiently explained God's plan to me over and over again. Marty told me his own story, and why he had come to believe that God's plan was the only solution to the problem of sin. His parents provided an example of how

God calls us to live once we have turned to Him for salvation. All of those things led to a day in October of my junior year in high school when I was ready to turn to God.

At a Nicky Cruz crusade, sitting next to Marty, the truth finally hit home. I already knew that I could not solve my problem with sin. But at last I knew that God could. When Nicky invited people forward, the Holy Spirit led me up out my seat and down to the front. The time had come to experience God's grace. I believed that I deserved to die for the sins I had committed. But I also believed that God had sent His Son, Jesus, to die in my place. That gift made it possible for God to bridge the gap between us. I was not righteous enough to save myself, but God was, and through His righteousness I was made right. I can claim no credit for this, but I can give glory to the God who saved me. Can you do the same?

Questions for Discussion

1. Romans 3:9-18

According to the Apostle Paul, what is man's condition? Does it make any difference what our race, color, or social status is? From which Old Testament passages did Paul quote here? To whom were those quotes first spoken?

Why does Paul feel comfortable applying it to all people? When did you first understand that they applied to you?

2. Romans 3:19-20

Who is under the law? What is the result of our being "under the law"? How does that make it impossible for us to be justified by the law? What does the law teach us about sin? What have you learned about sin through the law?

3. Romans 3:21-30

How do we become righteous? What part does Jesus Christ play in that? Why was it necessary for Jesus to die in our place? How does Jesus' blood atone for our sins? Whose righteousness is demonstrated by our atonement? How does that prevent us from boasting?

4. Romans 3:31

In what sense do you believe Paul uses the word "law" here? How does the gospel fulfill the law? Are we able to fulfill the law through Christ? If so, how? If not, why not? How is it that we can "establish" the law? How are you seeking to do that as you walk with God each day?

Eternal Life

Andrew Samuels

We believe that Jesus rose from the dead and lives eternally with the Father, and that He will come again with power and great glory. We believe that eternal life begins in knowing God through a commitment to Jesus Christ. We believe that because He died and lives again, resurrection with spiritual and imperishable bodies is the gift of God to believers.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Sunday — John 3:14-21

We did nothing to motivate God to save us. His motivation came from within Himself. He saw our plight and felt compassion for us. Probably the best known verse in the entire Bible tells us that it is God's love for the world that caused Him to give His Son Jesus to die for the sins of the world. So, love is the reason God has offered to us eternal life. Pray today that you may receive His unconditional love as well as His offer of eternal life.

Monday — John 5:24-30

What further assurance could anyone need than to hear Jesus say that whoever hears His word and believes Him who sent Him (the Father) has eternal life and will not be condemned. That is more than reason to celebrate. Have you personally placed your faith completely in Him and received His "no condemnation" assurance? You can do that today. Pray for His assurance that, having trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you will not be condemned.

Tuesday — John 6:47-59

A starving man needs food to sustain his physical life. The words of Jesus imply that without Him we starve to death—eternal death. Only the food that is found in Jesus can provide eternal life. According to our Lord, whoever eats of Him will live forever with Him. What a promise! Have you eaten of Him? Will you live forever with Him? Pray that your appetite for Him may be opened so that you can feast yourself on Him and enjoy eternal life.

Wednesday — John 10:22-30

Those who become part of the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ are called sheep. Jesus promises that His sheep will never perish, nor can they be snatched out of His hand. This is another magnificent promise of our Lord. Do you have God's guarantee? Are you in His hand? If you're not there, respond to the voice of the Shepherd and pray to become one of His sheep. Nothing else gives you eternal life.

Thursday — Acts 13:44-48

What a joy it is to know that we have been included in God's marvelous plan of salvation. What a waste it would be not to seize the opportunity of a lifetime— to be recipients of God's free gift of eternal life. The way has been made for us. All we need to do is walk through the door which God has opened. Have you made that step of receiving Christ, who died to save you? If not, why not do it right now? Jesus is waiting to receive you.

Friday — Hebrews 9:11-15

The blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer are inadequate to cleanse persons from sin, thus making them ready for eternal life with God. That is what made that old covenant insufficient. Only the blood of Christ can cleanse our sinfulness. That is the essence of the new covenant. When we come to Christ in repentance and faith, we become related to Him by blood. We therefore receive His eternal inheritance which was promised to us. Are you an heir? Have you made sure of your inheritance? You can do that by accepting the death of Christ and the shedding of His blood as payment for your sins.

Sabbath — 1 John 5:6-13

The Apostle John clearly wants his readers to know that they have eternal life. That knowledge, that certainty, comes from believing in Jesus Christ. Why then do so many people say they believe and at the same time are reluctant to say they have eternal life? O that God may grant to us the wonderful assurance that faith in the finished work of His Son, Jesus, gives us that assurance of eternal life. Is that assurance yours? It can be today.

The Testimony from Scripture

Does Jesus offer eternal life to us based on “saying the right words” or “having a warm religious feeling”? Is His offer based on an emotional moment when you felt you ought to do something and “walking an aisle seemed like the appropriate thing to do”? Or is it based on a need for assurance that you wouldn’t have to go to hell? There is one and only one way to receive eternal life, and it isn’t how a great many people think it is.

The man who came to Jesus to ask Him the all-important question of life appears to reflect typical Jewish thought of the day, which is that performing a single act would guarantee salvation (Matt. 19:16-21). That way of thinking is not only typical of Jews at the time of our Lord, but it may also be the common perspective in our day. When Jesus quoted to him from the Ten Commandments, He was telling the man that God’s requirements and God’s standards are perfection, that is, keeping the Ten Commandments without fail. God’s requirements have always been the same. They do not change. It is interesting that Jesus quotes to His inquirer five of the Commandments, numbers 5 through 9, and then includes what I believe is a summary of the last 6 Commandments, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

Jesus was asking the man to prove his claim to having been faithful to the commandments, especially the one which summarizes the last 6. His unwillingness to do so, demonstrated that his claim to having kept the commandments was false, hence he stood in need of salvation like everyone else. Jesus’ questioner made the same mistake that countless people have been making, and that is to attempt to gain eternal life through the keeping of the commandments. On the one hand, our attempts at eternal life by this means is understandable, since as we have already shown, perfection to the letter of the Decalogue is God’s requirement. On the other hand however, everything we know about ourselves from God’s Word, confirmed by our own actual experience, is that we are incapable of meeting God’s standards by ourselves. It is a human impossibility.

It is precisely for that reason that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins and then extends to us His gracious offer of eternal life. We must receive it by faith, that is a complete trust in His finished work. That involves living our lives in His power and strength. Probably the most liberating discovery I made in my life was when I learned that when it comes to my eternal life, God

is not looking for a series of promises from me. He is not so concerned with what I can do; He does not want to hear all the things I intend to do for Him. He is more concerned with what I will let Him do for me.

Faith is therefore the means through which we receive eternal life. The terms "grace" and "faith" need to be clarified. We are not saved by our faith. We are saved by God's grace. Grace is the instrument of salvation. It was God's plan carried out through Christ. We had no part in it, and deserved none of it. Faith is the agent whereby God has been able to apply His grace to the life of the sinner. Faith is simply the way we say yes to God's free gift of eternal life.

The reality of faith which gives us God's free gift of eternal life is demonstrated by the proof of a transformed life. Faith is not a fleeting emotional desire, nor is it blind acceptance. It is not merely accepting a set of facts, nor is it just believing in the teachings of Jesus. Faith is the reality of following Christ, which by its nature, gives evidence of a transformed life. Faith is one's life-response to Christ. To be sure, one is not saved by works; that is heretical. But the quality of genuine faith is shown in Scripture to be that which is living and productive.

The Testimony from History

It has always been the goal of the Christian Church to show people the way to eternal life. Some interesting statistics reveal that in mainline churches, 50 percent of the members are not certain of their salvation. This means that in the pews of the churches, about half of those who are members, are not sure of eternal life, although they would describe themselves as practicing Christians. My own conclusion to this suggested problem is that churches in general have done a poor job of communicating to people how they can have eternal life. That is tragic because the primary reason Jesus established His Church was to show mankind the way to eternal life.

One of the reasons the issue has become so complicated is that man has added to and subtracted from the purity of the Gospel. Jesus eloquently pointed out this very idea to the Pharisees and teachers of the law. He told them that they had let go of the commands of God and were holding on to the traditions of men (Mark 7:7). The traditions of men have led to the development of so many denominations within Christianity. Many people are confused because they are aware of so many churches and are genuinely puzzled as to which one is the right one.

The Protestant Reformation heralded a return to the basic tenets of the Christian faith, which had been lost in the Roman Catholic Church. The people in the pews again began reading the Bible for themselves, instead of depending on their spiritual leader to read and interpret it for them. They began to rediscover the simple truths of God's Word, including the all-important doctrine of eternal life. The theme of the Reformation: *Sola Scriptura, Sola Gracia, Sola Fide* emphasized that the way to eternal life is to be found only in the revealed Word of God (the Scriptures), and it comes through the grace of God alone, by the means of our faith alone. Anything less or more represents an adulteration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Eternal life does not come through faith plus anything.

Historically, the Church has had a tendency to place requirements for eternal life upon people that are not Biblical. The cardinal difference between the Christian faith and religion is that religion is man attempting to reach up to God through his own self efforts, while Christianity is God reaching down to man and making something out of him. Religion is trying to do things for God that are thought will appease Him. The Christian faith is about what man will allow God to do for him.

It is time to return to the basic, fundamental, pure, unadulterated truth of the Gospel. If the Church had done a better job of conveying the message of eternal life to people, so many church members would not be in doubt about their own eternal destiny. For the most part, churches differ on what I consider to be the non-essentials of the faith. In trying to maintain their distinctiveness, churches corrupt the purity of the Gospel, adding man made traditions.

The idea of eternal life as a gift is foreign to humans. We have been indoctrinated into thinking that nothing good in life is ever totally free. Our deceptive society makes us "free" offers in large print, but then brings us to reality with what's written underneath in smaller lettering. Maybe you are familiar with these expressions: "The large print giveth, but the fine print taketh away," or "There's no such thing as a free lunch." If God commissioned any of us with the task of coming up with a plan for extending eternal life to humanity, our plan would certainly have some kind of requirement. We tend to give things to those who deserve it. The Bible teaches that God's plan that provides eternal life is the exact opposite of that. It is extended to underserving humanity absolutely free. Praise God!

A Faith for Today

There is overwhelming evidence especially in the *Gospel of John* from the words of our Lord, that eternal life can and should be a present reality. John again in the epistle that bears his name, declares that he is writing so that his readers may know that they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). They don't have to wonder or doubt or question it. They can know for sure.

For all of our important possessions, such as a house or a car, we have no doubts whether we are in possession of them. We have a document to prove our stewardship of these things. Why then should we be uncertain about our most important possession? And, we have the document to prove it—God's Word.

Such assurance has practical benefits. It brings with it the removal of our guilt. That is done through Jesus' being credited with our sin. It was actually an exchange—our sin credited to Him, and His righteousness credited to us. Imagine the tremendous liberation there is in knowing that we have been completely forgiven of our sins

The assurance of eternal life also makes us children of God. So, we receive not only the judicial benefits of justification, but there are also the relational values described in the Scriptures as "adoption" and "sonship." In

extending to us eternal life, God makes us part of His family. We can think of our heavenly Father in the most intimate way, as a Daddy.

Assurance of eternal life also gives an inexpressible joy and peace which characterize one's attitude, perspective, and approach to life. This inner joy and peace from God helps to remove the limitation on our ability to love unconditionally.

An individual who knows that he or she has eternal life will not be motivated by fear. Fear and love do not mingle well. One will always dilute the other.

The joy of sharing one's faith is another benefit of knowing that one has eternal life. That knowledge becomes a strong motivator to share the greatest gift that can be received.

Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss the sincerity of the rich man in asking Jesus about getting eternal life. Why did Jesus respond by telling the rich man to obey the commandments?
2. Is eternal life a reward or a gift?
What is the difference?
3. When does eternal life begin?
4. Can a person be assured of eternal life now?

The Church

Kenneth D. Chroniger

We believe that the church of God is all believers gathered by the Holy Spirit and joined into one body, of which Christ is the Head. We believe that the local church is a community of believers organized in covenant relationship for worship, fellowship and service, practicing and proclaiming common convictions, while growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We believe in the priesthood of all believers and practice the autonomy of the local congregation, as we seek to work in association with others for more effective witness.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Mark and JoAnne Kandel

Study Scriptures —

Matthew 16:13-20; Acts 2:41-47; Romans 12:4-5; 15:5-7; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:11-16; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 10:23-25

Sunday — Ephesus — Revelation 2:1-7

You know the work I do in Your kingdom. I persevere in the work because it is pleasing to You. Your word instructs me to beware of false teachers. Strengthen me to constantly seek to learn and do Your will in all things. Help me to combine the experience and wisdom of years with the zeal of the youthful believer.

Monday — Smyrna — Revelation 2:8-11

You are our Savior who died and came to life again. You are life, the beginning and the end. Help me to remember that while I may have little material wealth, I am rich in You. My trials are temporary. If I remain faithful to You, my reward is eternal life. Guide me in following the course that You have provided that I may not be swayed by ungodly influences.

Tuesday — Pergamum — Revelation 2:12-17

I live in an evil world where believers are reviled rather than revered. You know my faith. Thank You for the Faith of the saints who have died, whose testimonies inspire me to remain faithful in trial and persecution. Use the strong in faith, encouraging those in need to overcome in You.

Wednesday — Thyatira — Revelation 2:18-29

Thank you for being my morning star. You provide me with hope and guidance. When there is no end to the dark night of despair, You shed light on me. Guide my paths. Guide my church. Help me to have discernment about those who would lead me away from You.

Thursday — Sardis — Revelation 3:1-6

Sometimes my church is able to put on a good front and impress others, appearing as a great church. Yet, a beautiful building and full pews on the Sabbath are nothing if Your Spirit is not with us. Guide the church in ministries so that we may focus on things of the Spirit. Help me to follow the spiritual leaders that my church may be brought closer to You.

Friday — Philadelphia — Revelation 3:7-13

Thank you for the wisdom in the study of Your word. You hold the key of eternal life. You open the door to life and welcome me in as Your child. You have purchased my salvation with your life. Thank you for understanding the trials I face. Help me to endure patiently until You deliver me to my reward. May I be worthy of Your name.

Sabbath — Laodicea — Revelation 3:14-22

Help when my church gets too comfortable. Wake us up before we sink from complacency to spiritual death. You rebuke and discipline those you love. Your discipline has benefit. Your rebuke affirms Your love. The door is open.

The Testimony from Scripture

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it” (Matt. 16:18, NASB). In this text and the surrounding passage we discover the essence of the doctrine of the church. In this scripture we are given the derivation, declaration, definition and deputation of the church.

The Derivation

The text makes it clear that the church is not that which begins in the heart and mind of individuals or groups. The church is called into being by someone beyond humanity. The confession of Peter leading to this pronouncement of Jesus specifically is revealed by the Father. The initiator, who brings the church into being, who creates, who builds, is the Son “... I will build”.

The Declaration

The church will be built in connection with specific declaration “...Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16, NASB). This declaration was made in the suburbs of Caesarea Philippi.

Why at this place? Its history made it a place to challenge the gods, having been a Canaanite sanctuary and having a cavern reminding the Greeks of the god Pan. Its name made it a place to challenge authority, as

it had both the title of the Emperor and the name of the puppet ruler Herod Philip. Its location 120 miles from Jerusalem made it ideal to challenge the popular notions about who Jesus was said to be. It is this confession which separates and calls the church out.

The Definition

What is it that was to be called into being? The answer perhaps lies in the Greek word *Ecclesia*. B.H. Carroll wrote, “Its primary meaning is: An organized assembly, whose members have been properly called out from private homes or business to attend public affairs. This definition necessarily implies prescribed conditions of membership.”¹ What bearing does this have on how we understand what Jesus would build?

1)The church was to be an assembly. It could be equated with a synagogue—“a together.”
2)The church was to be separated from other institutions.
3)The church would be a public institution, not a private concern.
4)There would be by implication conditions of membership.

The Deputation

What task did Jesus give the “called out public assembly”? The picture is one of battle being waged. It is the laying siege to a city, called “Hades.” Hades is the place or abode of the dead.

In this siege victory is assured, for the gates of the city itself will be opened. This assembly receives the commission to conquer the city of death in all its forms.

The Testimony from History

Johnathan Allen, Seventh Day Baptist scholar and from 1867-1892 president of Alfred University, wrote, "...it follows that the church in its essential nature is an organic life growth." In the same article he wrote, "...a simple unity, without variety faultlessly faultless, icily regular, splendidly null, dead perfection, no more, nothing more."²

Allen suggests to us several things about the church that are true by virtue of definition: 1)It has definite shape and form. 2)It is a unity. 3)It is alive.

Because the church is an organism, there are three functioning "Organific Laws" in effect: 1)"Equality of rights and privileges." 2) "Liberty.... Every member of the church has a right to the legitimate and harmonious use of all his or her powers for attaining the ends of a Christian life." 3)"Diversity of function or activity."³

While not denying a doctrine of a universal Christian community called "The Church," Allen's definition and the working out

of the "Organific Laws" exemplifies the historic fact that the Seventh Day Baptist Doctrine of *The Church* has placed its primary focus on the "Covenant Community"—"the locally called out gathered congregation."

Consider the statement on the Church in the 1833 *Expose*: "As we deem it unscriptural to admit, to the membership of the church, any person who does not yield obedience to the commandments of God, and the institutions of the Gospel, or who would be a subject of church censure (discipline), were he a member of the church, so we deem it equally improper to receive such at the Lord's table, or to partake with them of the Lord's Supper."

The emphasis here, to expand Allen's metaphor of the organism, is upon the single cell—the local congregation.

Concerning the necessity of organization into a body, we read in *Seventh Day Baptist Beliefs—A Manual of Study*, "When any truth becomes central and vital to the individual, there comes to him the desire to give it to others, not only through personal contact, but through organization. Therefore, beliefs crystallize into institutions. Christian faith and belief are more vital than ordinary beliefs of the world. By linking the soul to

Christ, they bring Christians into living fellowship with one another before bonds of outward organization exist. The outward organization expresses and symbolizes this inward union of spirit to Christ and to one another.”⁴ Herein lies the value of the coming together of the called out public assembly.

Consider our present statement of belief. There are ninety-four words that make up the Statement. Twenty-six of them speak about the “Universal Church,” even though some might question this upon the basis of the word “church”—not “Church.” Sixty, or just over 64 percent, of the words speak of the local church, and eight words could be placed in either category. In fact, the emphasis is placed so much on the local church in the present *Statement* that its purposes are set forth: “worship, fellowship, and service, practicing and proclaiming common convictions.”

The doctrinal history of our people would suggest that the shape, unity and the aliveness of the organism called the church is found in the local Seventh Day Baptist congregation.

A Faith for Today

How important is your church? The writer of *Hebrews* put it this way: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope with-

out wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb. 10:23-25, NASB).

How important is your church? Don Erickson asks us to ponder, in excerpts from an illustration titled “Funny.”

“Funny how a one hundred dollars looks so big when you take it to church, but so small when you take it to the mall. Funny how long it takes to serve God for an hour but how quickly a team plays sixty minutes of basketball. Funny how long a couple of hours spent at church are but how short they are when watching a movie. Funny how we get thrilled when a baseball game goes into extra innings, but we complain when a sermon is longer than regular time. Funny how people want to get a front seat at any game or concert but scramble to get a back seat at church services. Funny how we need two or three weeks advance notice to fit a church event into our schedule, but can adjust our schedule for other events at the last moment.”⁵ How important is your church?

Some of you remember standing around an evening

campfire at one of our Seventh Day Baptist camps. The pastor shared the value of the church to the individual by removing a burning coal away from the fire. As you watched, soon the coal burned out completely, while the rest of the fire would continue into the night. When the main fire had turned to coals, you could still be warmed by the heat. At the same time that lonely coal had become so cold that you could pick it up in the palm of your hand, and squeezing it you could turn it to powder. How important is your church?

¹B. H. Carroll, *Ecclesia—The Church*. Little Rock: Challenge Press, nd., 8.

²Jonathan Allen, "The Church," *The Sabbath Recorder*. Westerly, Rhode Island: George Utter Publisher, 20, (January 14, 1864), 6.

³*Ibid.*, 6.

⁴Ahva J. C. Bond, Alva L. Davis, and Erlo E. Sutton, *Seventh Day Baptist Beliefs: A Manual for Study*. Janesville, Wisconsin: The American Sabbath Tract Society, 1941, reprint 1983, 49.

⁵Don Erickson, "Funny," in *Sermons Org@onelist.com*, ed. Shelton Cole, September 8, 1999.

Questions for Discussion

1. What requirements are necessary to belong to the universal Church? Are they different from those required to belong to the local church?
2. Since our statement speaks of the local church in covenant relationship, how important is your church covenant? What does it contain?
3. In reviewing what might be cited as the reasons for covenant relationship—worship, fellowship, service, practicing and proclaiming common convictions rank—them in the order of importance and be able to explain why.
4. How does your church help you grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.
5. What does it mean when our statement says, "We believe in the Priesthood of all believers?" How does this affect the way you think of your ministry in the church?
6. Why is autonomy of the local congregation important? Is there a difference between being Independent, and autonomous?
7. How is your church like or different than the local Lions/Rotary club, a small business, or a local charity?

Baptism

Kevin J. Butler

We believe that baptism of believers in obedience to Christ's command is a witness to the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We believe in baptism by immersion as a symbol of death to sin, a pledge to a new life in Him.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Sunday — Matthew 3:1-6, 11-17

Father, help me to truly repent and turn away from my wicked ways. May I seek Your truth and Your ways, and once being awakened to them, have the courage to do what is right. Guide me to Your desire for me to be righteous.

Monday — Matthew 28:18-20

Lord, how often do we flounder and wonder what we should do? Thank you for this clear and uncompromising commission to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach. And we thank you for the promise of your authoritative and loving presence as we “Therefore go.”

Tuesday — Acts 2:36-41

Heavenly Father, because the three thousand followed Peter's command to “Repent and be baptized,” and accepted his invitation for baptism, I can include myself as one of those to whom these promises were given: forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Wednesday — Romans 6:1-11

Dear God, as Christ died, I have died. As Christ was raised, so I am raised to eternal life. Thank you that since death no longer has mastery over Jesus, I am fully alive to You through Christ.

Thursday — Colossians 2:8-12

Lord, thank you for revealing Yourself completely to us through Christ Jesus. May my baptism remind me that my sins have been

buried and washed away through that same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

Friday — Galatians 3:26-27

Father, what a privilege it is to call You “Father.” Through faith in You we are now Your children. Thank You for wrapping Your loving arms around us and clothing us in a righteousness that can only come through Your Son, Jesus.

Sabbath — Matthew 10:32-33

Lord, I thank You for guiding me toward a believer’s baptism. May that public testimony be a true and loving acknowledgment of You before other people. And may my public testimony of worshipping You today acknowledge to others that You are the True and Loving Lord of my life.

The Testimony from Scripture

In the Old Testament, purification ceremonies were invoked for situations of "uncleanness." At first, much of the uncleanness carried little moral content. "Purification" was the removal—usually by water—of a ceremonial taint by ceremonial means (Exod. 30:19-21; Lev. 15-16.)

As religious ethics developed, these cleansings became connected with moral behavior. In his book, *History of Religions*, G.F. Moore states, "The result of the 'inclusion of the moral' in the sphere of the religious is that the physical means effective in removing uncleanness are employed to purify a man from moral defilement, or to protect him against the consequences of his wrong doing."¹

The whole system of purification may have lost much of its inner meaning, revealing the tendency of man to give ritual performances a symbolic meaning.

Against this background came Jewish proselyte baptism—a ceremony, with water, for those who converted to Judaism. According to Alec Gilmore, it was an initiation ceremony, and different from other purification rites in these ways: (1) It was for convinced and instructed converts, and it was a witnessed ceremony. (2) It was an initiation ceremony, marking a break

with the old life, and a joyful acceptance of the new. (3) It was an act of dedication. (4) It carried with it the idea of cleansing. (5) It was more than a symbol or declaration; it was an effective sign.²

We can see many similarities between Jewish proselyte baptism and John's baptism. Yet where the Jewish ritual put emphasis on a change of creed, Christian baptism places emphasis on the change of heart. And John's baptism also added an end-time association; he looked forward to the dawn of the Messianic age and sought to prepare people for it.

Jesus submitted to His own baptism as part of the Father's plan to fulfill all righteousness (Matt. 3:15). And it became for him a moment of decision and consecration to the tasks of public ministry. In the gospels, each telling of Jesus' baptism is followed by his temptation from Satan.

The baptism of our Lord was also an act of identification with the people whom Jesus had come to save. We are called to baptism.

Half of the Scripture references from which we draw our *Statement of Belief* carry the allusion to our being baptized into Christ's death, buried and raised with Him to new life. The mode

of immersion—best supported by Scripture (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Col. 2:12)—signifies this death and burial. In baptism, we have clothed ourselves with Christ (Gal. 3:27) and have become one in Him by faith.

The Testimony from History

Different opinions and teachings concerning baptism emerged in the early Church. During the final decade of the second century, Tertullian wrote in strong protest against the practice of infant baptism.

But Tertullian must have formed his opinion by observing the actual practice and not from the writings of the period. In the *Didache* (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), the only dictates attached to baptism concerned the candidate's pre-ritual fasting, the officiant's threefold invocation of the Godhead, and the desire for running water.

Justin Martyr's *Apologies* mentioned similar concerns, adding his view that the one baptized obtains the remission of former sins. According to Justin, the ritual was to be followed by congregational prayers and the celebration of communion.

In the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, this Church father gets more elaborate. Baptism is preceded by an anointing with the oil of exorcism, the candidate's affirmation of the

Apostles' Creed, followed by another anointing of oil (of thanksgiving) and the laying-on-of-hands by the bishop.

Nowhere mentioned is the age of the candidate, although strongly implied is the ability to understand the process and its importance.

Since the Church grew so rapidly during those early centuries, this kind of baptismal preparation became necessary. By Hippolytus' time, the preparation had been institutionalized.

With more stress on the connection between baptism and the forgiveness of sins, two effects resulted. If the ritual truly caused forgiveness, then many candidates would postpone the ceremony as long as possible so that more of their sins would be absolved. On the other hand, the desire to have sins cleansed caused parents to bring forth their children to receive the sacrament.

During and after the fifth century, paedobaptism (baptism of infants) became widespread. It was impossible for the bishop to preside at all baptisms. Yet because paedobaptism was believed to be imperative, and because many infants died shortly after their birth, the complex initiation rite had to be split up.

Soon after birth, the water baptism was received, while the anointing and laying-on-of-

hands was given later when the bishop visited the parish. This two-step approach was considered as one rite of initiation into the Church.

The Reformers apparently misunderstood the purpose of the episcopal visitations, seeing them as times when the baptized “confirmed” their baptismal vows and were thereby fully admitted into the Church. Thus began the Protestant rite of infant baptism and confirmation.³

John Smyth, founder of the first modern Baptist church, called for a return to New Testament times and a rejection of all later developments in ministry and liturgy.⁴ Smyth put this call into action by first baptizing himself, then his disciple Thomas Helwys, who in 1612 founded the first Baptist church on English soil.⁵

A Faith for Today

So, is baptism a “sacrament”? Some folks in the Reformed or Protestant tradition would rather not use the term. Webster defines sacrament as: “a formal religious act that is sacred as a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality.”

I see no problem with that, as long as it remains a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality. When the spiritual reality is limited to and must manifest itself through the sacrament—that is

when we start using the words “rite,” “ritual observance,” and “ordinance.” As long as it remains a sign or symbol, it is a sacrament as it points to a sacred, spiritual truth.

We can retain the sacraments, but avoid sacramentalism. We must watch out for doctrines which say that a sacrament, or even the Church, is a source of grace. The Church does not dispense grace; it is not a redeemer. Grace is a gift from God alone.

Baptism belongs to the forgiven. It is neither initiation nor for the forgiveness of sins. It is for those already forgiven and initiated by commitment to Christ.

The Church and its ordinances are but instruments of God’s grace. Our baptism does not cause repentance but witnesses to the change in one’s life (Acts 10:47-48). Immersion signifies the burial of the old man and the rising to new life in Christ.

We must remember that it is not the mode, not the person conducting, not the water (water cannot save anyone unless they are dying of thirst; and then it is only temporary and not the living water that wells up to eternal life [John 4:13-14]) that saves. The external act will not transform an unbeliever into a Christian.

I was raised in a church which practiced infant baptism. Following several years of worshiping and fellowshiping with Seventh Day Baptists, I was fortunate to experience baptism by immersion as a newlywed. It was my choice and my public confession that I was a believer.

My membership into the local church did not take place immediately. That was not the reason I was baptized. My plunging under the frigid waters of Fish Creek in Verona, New York, signified a step of obedience that led me onto a path of ministry.

As Christ's earthly ministry began after his baptism, so it should be for believers today. The candidate not only becomes linked to the Church and local congregation, but he or she is linked to continual spiritual growth.

A new relationship with God through the resurrected Christ has begun (1 Pet. 3:21). A public confession has been made. An irrevocable commitment to Christ has been born.

¹G. F. Moore, *History of Religions*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914-20, vol. 1, 43.

²Alec Gilmore, ed., *Christian Baptism*. Chicago: The Judson Press, 1959, 68-70.

³Donald Bridge and David Phipers, *The Water that Divides: The Baptism Debate*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977, p. 84.

⁴W.T. Whitley, *The Works of John Smith*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915, Vol. 1, pp. 269-320.

⁵Dale Moody, *Baptism: Foundation for Christian Unity*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967, p. 241.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does being "baptized into Christ Jesus" mean to you (Rom. 6:1-11)? How are we baptized "into his death"? Did your baptism experience cause you to feel united with Jesus—in His death and His resurrection? How have we been freed from sin? Do you count yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ?
2. What did Jesus commission His disciples to do (Matt. 28:19-20)? How are you involved in these three mandates?
3. How has baptism "clothed" us with Christ (Gal. 3:26-27)?
4. How can you support baptism by immersion when the majority of Christendom baptizes infants?
5. How significant was your baptism experience? To yourself? To the one officiating? To those observing? To the world right now?

The Lord's Supper

Gordon P. Lawton

We believe that the Lord's Supper commemorates the suffering and death of our Redeemer until He comes, and is a symbol of union in Christ and a pledge of renewed allegiance to our risen Lord.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Study Scriptures —

Mark 14:22-25; Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:17-34.

Sunday — Exodus 12:1-13

How strange your commands to captive Israel seem our Father. The special food—the chosen lamb, the blood—are all symbols with meaning old and new. May I be ready to obey your command even if it is to be different. Thank you for your special mark on all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Monday — Exodus 12:14-30

Father, we sing, "to God be the glory, great things He hath done." This hymn line could have been sung by the children of Israel as they plundered Egypt (Ex. 12:35-36) while leaving. Your might was shown in the ten plagues, as was your protection by saving Goshen from most of them. Vividly your protection was shown as you passed over the houses marked with the blood of the Passover lambs. Open my eyes and heart to see and accept your protection. Ready my hands, feet and voice to be obedient to you. Amen.

Tuesday — Matthew 26:17, 26-30

How powerful, Lord, are the illustrations of bread and cup: broken bread for your body, the cup for your blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Thank you for your willingness to become a servant. May I also give of myself to others and to the building of your church. Amen.

Wednesday — 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Almighty God, thank you for being present when we gather in your name. Your Spirit encourages and empowers so that sincerity and truth will prevail. Enable me to discern my sin and reject it. You call us to do hard things. Hard, because we love people who say they love you but do what you say is wrong.

May the fellowship of your people be sweet and pure, and may the discipline of your church be redemptive and bring reconciliation. Amen.

Thursday — 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

At your table, Lord, your act of atonement is again demonstrated and the unity of your body is shown. In taking the bread and cup I affirm my dependance on you alone for my salvation and my need for and dependance on those who are my sisters and brothers because of our common allegiance to you. If I am worshipping at any other altar, Lord, show me. My desire is to serve and worship you alone. Amen.

Friday — 1 Corinthians 11:17-26

Eternal Father, our daily duties direct our focus toward our families, friends, work and responsibilities. Sometimes we forget to look for you in the normal routine. Each week as your Sabbath begins we are reminded of your care and love for us. When we gather as your body, we sense your presence and celebrate our unity because of you.

Coming to your table is special and full of meaning. There we remember anew your sacrifice and by partaking declare again, "Jesus did die for me." Thank you God for your great gifts. Amen.

Sabbath — 1 Corinthians 11:27-34

Praise to God, it is Sabbath! Help me, Master, to recognize your body as we gather for worship today. Let not my fears and feelings blind me to the worth and potential of all my covenant brothers and sisters. Send your Spirit to encourage and convict. Let not a wrong unforgiven, jealousy, anger or covetousness cloud my focus on you. As I wholeheartedly join others in worshipping today, give us all a glimpse of the joy and beauty that surrounds your throne. Amen.

The Testimony from Scripture

The context of the Lord's Supper is the Passover meal. It was this meal which Jesus ate with his disciples in that upper room (Matt. 26:17). It was to remember and celebrate God's deliverance of His people Israel from Egypt (Ex. 13:3). The Feast of Unleavened bread occurred for one week immediately following the Passover (Lev. 23:6). This was the first feast on the Jewish religious calendar (Ex. 12:1-28) and was like our Independence Day.

The Old Testament history books tell of the Passover being celebrated during the reigns of Hezekiah (2 Chr. 30:1) and Josiah (2 Chr. 35:18), as well as by Ezra and the returning exiles (Ezra 6:19). It is implied in 2 Chronicles 35:18 that the Passover had been celebrated continuously, although specific details are not given for each generation.

Jesus' family celebrated the Passover in Jerusalem each year. When Jesus was 12, he caused a stir by not returning home at the appointed time (Luke 2:41f). John records many of Jesus' encounters with the religious leaders at Passover times (2:13; 6:4; 11:55). Herod kept Peter in prison over a Passover (Acts 12:4).

During the Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus used elements in the meal to point to

his sacrificial atoning death. A study of the Passover meal as celebrated by Jews today can deepen our appreciation for the symbolism which Jesus took and redirected.

All the gospels record the meal. Matthew and Mark speak of Jesus' using the bread and the cup. Luke notes a cup, then bread and the cup. This is not a contradiction but additional information about the Passover meal. John speaks of the "evening meal" (John 13:2) and in retrospect of "the supper" (John 21:20). He does mention bread (13:26-30), but this was not the bread which Jesus broke and to which he gave new meaning. John does not mention either the broken bread or the cup; rather, he records the teaching that surrounded the meal, including His teaching about servanthood as He washed the disciples' feet.

Outside the gospels the only other references which speak of the "Lord's Supper" are in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11. The early church "broke bread" together (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 27:35) which has been interpreted by some as the Lord's Supper. Communion may have been celebrated at their fellowship meals, but the breaking of bread had more to do with eating and sharing a meal than with celebrating

the Lord's Supper. It is possible that the early church celebrated the Lord's Supper only annually at Passover.

Our Biblical source of teaching regarding the Lord's Supper after Jesus' resurrection is in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. He presents the Lord's Supper as being taken with a meal and as a powerful display of unity in the church.

Paul makes it clear that only those who have an undivided allegiance to God should be at the Lord's table (1 Cor. 10:14-22), that by eating the bread and drinking the cup the participant testifies to his or her dependence on Christ for salvation (1 Cor. 11:23-26), and that by partaking together we are recognizing the body of Christ to which we belong (1 Cor. 11:29, 12:27). In 1 Corinthians 11:26-29, the elements of the Lord's Supper are spoken of together: bread and cup, eat and drink, body and blood. There is one exception in verse 29 regarding recognizing "the body of the Lord" (NIV). Was the blood not to be recognized too, or is something else intended? If chapter 11 is seen in context with chapter 12, then this variation in verse 29 is not speaking of the elements or the mystical presence of Christ other than as present in the individuals who make up the local body of the church.

These principles are mirrored in the Passover meal. Only those men who have taken the sign of the covenant (circumcision) could partake, the meal reminded of and declared dependence on God for redemption, and the meal was taken in family units, not as a great congregation of the whole nation, although the families of the nation all took the meal at the same time (Ex. 12:27, 43-49).

The Testimony from History

For the first Sabbath-keeping Baptists in the new world, communion was more than a personal participation at the Lord's Table. Partaking showed the unity of Covenant relationship between those who shared at the Lord's Table.¹

When the belief that Christians should observe the ten commandments, including the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of the Bible, was spread by Stephen Mumford and others who accepted this truth, the leaders of the Baptist church in Newport, Rhode Island, began to preach strongly against this belief, saying that these people had gone back to "beggarly elements" (Gal. 4:9).² Some of those who had embraced the Sabbath turned back under this pressure and said they were wrong, the Sabbath was not to be observed. The remaining Sabbath-keepers

refrained from taking communion with those who had turned back (Heb. 6:4-6) and consequently from taking communion with the church. The leaders of the church called for a time of discussion, which was not a fair hearing, but rather a time to point out the "error" of their Sabbath belief and an opportunity for them to repent. It became clear "that they could not keep the Sabbath and walk in fellowship with the church"³ — so withdrawing from membership was the only way to be true to the Word of God. Five withdrew in December 1671, and sixteen days later seven persons covenanted together to form the First Seventh-day Baptist Church of Newport, Rhode Island.

Although the controversy had been brewing over the Sabbath, with whom to commune at the Lord's Table was a question which helped focus the problem and brought it to a conclusion. "...It was expected, even demanded, that the covenant be renewed in the sacrament of communion. This is one of the reasons why so many of the old church records are filled with attempts to discipline members who had given evidence of breaking the covenant. They took seriously Christ's instructions about being reconciled to one's brother before going to the altar" (Matt. 5:23-24).⁴ The Sabbath-keepers

were accused of denying Christ by refusing to take communion. They refrained for they saw the turning back of some from the Sabbath as covenant-breaking and therefore they could not renew their covenant with them at the Lord's Table.

In the middle of the 19th century Jonathan Allen (1823-1892) wrote in *The Sabbath Recorder* that baptism "...gives church membership. An unbaptized person is out of the church; a baptized person is in the church."⁵ He continued, "...as baptism is the formal initiating covenant, whereby the individual becomes a consecrated member of the outward body of Christ, so communion is the ever-recurring formal covenant whereby each participant declares himself a member of this body—an ever-renewing consecration to this brotherhood, with all of the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of membership. ...No church has a right, according to our argument, to receive to its communion a person that it is not willing to receive to its membership, with his faith and practice; nor on the other hand, has a person a right to commune with a church that he is not willing and ready to become a member of, with its doctrines and practices. And why? Simply because, by communion, he does become a member."⁶

As a child I did not understand the connection between salvation, baptism, communion and church membership and discipline. I knew it was there, for my mother informed me that to take communion I needed to be baptized. Not all see this connection today.

A Faith for Today

Some Seventh Day Baptist Churches find meaning in participating in World Wide Communion each year at the beginning of October. Members of others churches choose not to participate in Communion outside their local church, refraining even at the General Conference.

Some see only elements which remind us of Jesus sacrifice, others see Christ actually present in the elements. Some call Baptism and the Lord's Supper ordinances while others list these events and others as sacraments.

¹Don Sanford, "Entering Into Covenant: The History of Seventh Day Baptists in Newport," in *Newport History: Bulletin of Newport Historical Society*, (Summer 1994), 4.

²Lewis A. Platts, "Seventh-Day Baptists in America Previous to 1802." Vol. I, *Seventh Day Baptists in Europe and America*. Plainfield, New Jersey: American Sabbath Tract Society, 1910, 123.

³*Ibid.*, 124.

⁴Sanford, "Entering Into Covenant," 4.

⁵Jonathan Allen, "Communion," in *The Sabbath Recorder*, 21, (July 27, 1865).

⁶Allen, "Communion," (August 3, 1865).

Questions for Discussion

1. Is there a Biblical standard for those who may take the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:14-22; 11:26-27)?
Is there a Biblical standard for those who may serve or officiate at the Lord's Supper?
2. Is there a connection between baptism, church membership and the Lord's Supper? Is there an order in which these should be experienced?
3. Is the Lord's Supper strictly between God and you? If not, how do we show this beyond sitting together in the same room while we participate in the Lord's Supper? Why do we generally wait to partake until all are served?
4. Does the church covenant have a place at the Lord's Table? Is discipline in the church, with an eye toward reconciliation, connected at all with the Lord's Supper?
5. During your communion service is there an awareness of the unity of the believers present, or is the focus only on Jesus' suffering and death and on an individual union with and recommitment to Him?

The Sabbath

Gabriel E. Bejjani

We believe that the Sabbath of the Bible, the seventh day of the week, is sacred time, a gift of God to all people, instituted at creation, affirmed in the Ten Commandments and reaffirmed in the teaching and example of Jesus and the apostles.

We believe that the gift of Sabbath rest is an experience of God's eternal presence with His people.

We believe that in obedience to God and in loving response to His grace in Christ, the Sabbath should be faithfully observed as a day of rest, worship, and celebration.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Sunday — Genesis 2:2-3

At the end of creation, God ordained the seventh day to be special. God blessed the day and made it holy. In other words, the Sabbath was set aside as a vessel of imparting a blessing to all of God's creation.

Monday — Exodus 16:4-5, 22-30

This is the first reference of the seventh day or Sabbath since the creation record in Genesis two. Exodus 16:23 is probably the key verse of the text. It is the first time that the seventh day is called the Sabbath; it is at this point that God repeated that the seventh day was holy. This is also the first time that God "commanded" the day to be kept as holy.

Tuesday — Exodus 20:8-11

The Sabbath commandment was the fourth. It is at the end of the commandments dealing with our relationship with God and the beginning of our relationship with other people. The Sabbath reminds us of our obligation to worship God and to love Him by putting Him first. As a result of that, we move on to the other commandments of loving others as we love ourselves.

Wednesday — Ezekiel 20:20

The Lord is taking the initiative to establish a covenant relationship with His people. They have done nothing to deserve to be His people; on the contrary, they continuously rejected Him by disobeying His laws and profaning the Sabbath. So now the Lord calls on them to accept Him as their God and act as His people. The Sabbath was to be the “sign” of their allegiance to God.

Thursday — Isaiah 58:13-14

These two verses give us principles on how to keep the Sabbath (v. 13), and the blessings that result from keeping it (v. 14). A principle is something that can be applied to all people in all ages regardless of cultural orientation. If we keep the Sabbath as prescribed in verse 13, we will enjoy what the Lord will do in our lives; we will find our joy in Him and ride on the heights of the land.

Friday — Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus said that His purpose in coming was not to do away with the law but to fulfill it. The word “fulfill” has several possible meanings. However, as we look at Jesus’ life and preaching, we get the sense that Jesus came to bring out the full meaning of the law. He was the perfect sacrifice for our sins that the law required, and thus He fulfilled the law.

Sabbath — Mark 2:27-28

Jesus’ disciples have just been accused of breaking the Sabbath by plucking and eating ears of corn on the Sabbath. They have not broken any biblical Old Testament laws, but rabbinical laws. Sabbath observance had deviated from its original intention. Notice the use of two words: “man” and “made.” The Sabbath was “made” at creation and not given with the law. The Sabbath was not made for the Jewish people, but for all humanity.

The Testimony from Scripture

The Sabbath has gone from being an unquestioned practice, to a hotly debated issue in many Christian circles, and finally to being considered not binding on Christians by the majority of churches and denominations. However, the seventh day Sabbath is a biblical command that cannot be refuted. It was set apart at the end of creation, commanded in Exodus 20:8-11, practiced by Jesus and the early church, and is still valid for us believers today.

In Genesis 2:2,3, God rested on the seventh day after finishing His creation, and He “blessed” the seventh and “made” it “holy.” There was more to it than God’s taking a break from His labor. God did not need to rest; He was declaring that the foundations of the earth were not all laid out (“rest” then in Genesis 2 is ceasing from creating).

The word “bless” has to do with a spiritual power that fills an object or a person with God’s peace. Applied to the Sabbath, it became a conductor of God’s power. When something is “holy,” it means that it is set apart for God’s service. “Every seventh day a miracle comes to pass, the resurrection of the soul, of the soul of man and the soul of all things. A medieval sage declares: the world which was created in six days was a world

without a soul. It was on the seventh day that the world was given a soul.”¹

God indeed gave us a “soul” by giving us the Sabbath that was blessed and made holy.

In Exodus 20:8-11, we see the Sabbath as part of the Ten Commandments. Since, the Sabbath is in the Decalogue, we must enter the realm of the law. Our understanding of the law to a great extent will shape the way we interpret the Sabbath commandment and its validity for us today. Most Christians conjure up images of obligations and spiritual slavery when they hear the word “law.” The Psalmist, however, exclaims that the law is to be loved. “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long” (Ps. 119:97, NIV). Why is there an apparent contradiction between the way many Christians have come to feel about the law and the way it was viewed in the Old Testament?

Let us begin by viewing Jesus’ and Paul’s attitudes about the law. Jesus in Matthew 5:17-19 states clearly that He came to fulfill the law or accomplish it. How did He do that?

In Paul’s major treatise on the law in the book of Romans, he discusses the law in several points. “The wages of sin is death.” Sin is breaking the law. But, the major point of Romans

7:7-13 is the weakness of the law. The weakness is in our inability to keep it. The same theme was given by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. He magnified the requirements of the law to let us know that we cannot keep it on our own. Romans 8:1-4 sums up the matter by stating that the law was powerless to save us. God sent His son to die on the cross as a sin offering. So, the Holy Spirit gives us the power to live the righteous life. Paul was trying to correct the Judaizer's concept that the law was needed for salvation. Today, we need to realize that keeping the Sabbath is not the cause of our salvation; we are saved by grace through faith in Christ. But, the Sabbath observance is the fruit of our salvation. Because we are saved, we acknowledge Christ by worshipping Him in obedience on His Holy Day.

In the New Testament, Christ practiced Sabbath observance: "on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom" (Luke 4:16b, NIV). Jesus performed miracles on the Sabbath. All these miracles were not necessary to be done on the Sabbath. He did them on purpose to challenge the pharisaical and rabbinical rules and regulations concerning the Sabbath observance. They had surrounded God's gift to man with so many rules and regulations that the

Sabbath became a day of burdens and not joy. That is why he declared that, "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, NIV).

The disciples and Paul in the book of Acts worshipped on the Sabbath, preached, and taught on it (e.g. Acts 17:2; 13:14; 16:11-13). The Council of Jerusalem was called to discuss the gentile Christian's acceptance of Christ and the relationship to the Jewish laws and practices. The Sabbath issue was never questioned (Acts 15:1-29). The Sabbath was not only practical, but was accepted with no question or controversy.

The Testimony from History

In Exodus 19:3-8, God called His people to enter into a covenant relationship with Him. In verse 5, God told the people, if you "obey" and "keep" my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession. In verse 8, the people agreed to do all that the Lord wants from them. The covenant is followed by giving of the Law in Exodus 20. Obedience was the response that God wanted from His people—the response to the grace of choosing them to be His people.

The Sabbath was to be the sign of the covenant between God and His people. It was so important that God repeated it twice in Exodus 31:13,17 and in

Ezekiel 20:12,20. It was a weekly reminder to them that they are His. He has delivered them out of bondage; He has redeemed them. There are many Sabbath passages in the Old Testament which reiterate the fourth commandment or give applications.

In the New Testament, the concept of obedience is emphasized not as an option for believers, but as a requirement. John 14:15 (NIV) says, "If you love me keep my commandments." We need to notice the similarity with Exodus 19:5, "if you will obey me fully and keep my covenant..." (NIV).

The Sabbath is still a valid command in the New Testament and for us today. We have seen how the Sabbath was instituted at creation and reminded the people of their redemption. The same themes are repeated in the Gospels. Mark 2:27 ties the Sabbath to creation. John 5:17 says, "My Father is working until now, and I myself am working" (NASB). This is also an indication to the creation origin of the Sabbath. Some Christians have interpreted this to mean that since God has been continually working in creation and preservation this abrogates the Sabbath law. However, God is not doing the work of creation, but that of redemption. This brings out the redemptive significance of keeping the Sabbath.

In Luke 4:16-30, Jesus on the Sabbath day proclaims the purpose of his mission. His mission was to proclaim the good news of redemption. Luke brings out the theme more in the account of a Sabbath healing (Luke 13:10-21). After Jesus healed the crippled woman, He was reprimanded. He responded by saying, "Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath from what bound her?" (Luke 13:16).

So Jesus did not break the Sabbath, but brought out its full intent and meaning. Paul in the book of Acts worshipped and taught on the Sabbath. He preached the Gospel of Christ, which ties the Sabbath to redemption. Observance of Sunday began among Christian groups in the second century and was made official in the fourth century. Although some theologians today hold the position that the Sabbath was transferred to Sunday because of Christ's resurrection, there is no biblical basis for it.

Sabbath-keepers existed throughout history. Seventh Day Baptists became the bearers of Sabbath-keeping since the seventeenth century. Many Christians are either re-thinking their position on the Sabbath issue or accepting its biblical basis.

A Faith for Today

My personal faith in Christ has grown over the years. In the beginning of my experience as a believer, arguments over the Sabbath issue were frequent. I loved to prove how right my position was because it was biblical and how wrong Sunday observance was. However, I realized that this was not helpful at all. Recently, one pastor from a Sunday church asked me why we keep the Sabbath. My answer was because it was biblical and asked him to tell me why he keeps Sunday. His silence and hesitation in answering spoke volumes on his inability to justify his position biblically. A professor at Fuller Seminary said in class, "Our friend here who is a Seventh Day Baptist keeps the real biblical Sabbath."

The debate over the Sabbath basis in scripture is not a burning issue for us today as it used to be. And the believer who investigates scripture with a clear and unbiased attitude will not be able to deny that the Sabbath is the day to be kept. The real issue for us at the present is to keep the Sabbath faithfully.

The Sabbath was given for our benefit. God, who created me, knows that the keeping of the Sabbath is vital for me. With all the distractions of work, leisure, television, and sports, Sabbath is not being "remembered"

and kept Holy. Our challenge is to put God first in our lives by giving the twenty-four hour period to him. The Sabbath is not kept by just worshipping for an hour in church and then proceeding to do "our" own thing.

We are to obey God because He saved us. The devil puts obstacles in our way. My own experience tells me that God will always honor us for our obedience. We might suffer temporarily, but God will give us the victory. Keeping the Sabbath in a Muslim country brought me troubles, but my Savior always delivered me. Trust God, and He will bless you as you keep His Sabbath Holy.

¹Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. New York: SSNG, 1986, 84.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do some people familiar with Scripture accept the Sabbath as an intellectual concept but fail to observe the Sabbath?
2. What are some of your Sabbath Day activities? Are they consistent with your understanding of Scripture?
3. Do you believe the Old Testament law applies to Christians?
4. How did Jesus fulfill the law?

Evangelism

Don A. Sanford

We believe that Jesus Christ commissions us to proclaim the Gospel, to make disciples, to baptize and to teach observance of all that He has commanded. We are called to be witnesses for Christ throughout the world and in all human relationships.

Study Scriptures and Daily Meditations

Ronald J. Elston, Sr.

Sunday — Matthew 24:1-14

Sharing the Good News of God's Kingdom is the thrust of Evangelism. As the light of the world we have good news to share. We are to share this precious news with the whole world, not just a few but with everyone. We as Christians must stand first in the faith, knowing that not all will believe but we must make them hear.

Christ will return for his people, and you and I must do our part in proclaiming the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Are you letting your light shine for the Lord?

Monday — Matthew 28:18-20

The Great Commission gives us our marching orders in the powerful Army of God (Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; John 17:18; 20:21; and Acts 1:8). The orders come from the Commander and advise us of the direction we should follow. We do not do this on our own but based upon His authority. Go and make disciples of all nations. We will not go alone; He has promised to be with us. What a wonderful privilege to know that we are going in His name with His message of salvation. Have you shared the good news today?

Tuesday — Acts 1:1-8

A key passage for evangelism is found in Christ's final words to His disciples prior to His ascension with the assertion of power. Jesus declared that He has all power in heaven and earth; therefore He had the authority to give his followers power. He told them where and what their mission was to be. Their theater of operation was to be the world. They would teach conversion symbolized by

baptism, and they would teach obedience to His Commandments. They were to give a witness and be a witness where they lived. Have you asked for power in becoming a greater witness where you live?

Wednesday — 2 Corinthians 4:1-2, 5-6

Through God's mercy we are given this special Ministry. However, we know that it can be hindered by deception. We must let the light of the Lord's truth shine through our lives. We must set forth the truth plainly in the sight of God.

We must preach Jesus our Lord and ourselves as servants for Jesus' sake. Jesus is the heavenly magnet that draws men to God. Are you letting him lead in your life?

Thursday — 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

Can the old become new? Yes! Each of us becomes a new person through Jesus Christ. All of this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ. We have been adopted into His family. He is our heavenly Father.

We are Christ's Ambassadors. We represent Christ and God before men. He has given us new life, made us new creatures. We are to tell others of the wonderful love of God. Have you accepted the position of Ambassador to the Most High God?

Friday — Ephesians 6:14-20

We see God's provision that every soldier of God has the proper battle gear for the Spiritual Warfare in which we are to engage. We are to stand and not be blown around by unsound doctrine. We are to be on alert, standing guard over the precious word that God has given us as Ambassadors of His Kingdom to proclaim the Good News of Salvation. No matter what the circumstances, we are to give account fearlessly. Have you put on the whole armor of God so that you can take your stand?

Sabbath — 1 Peter 3:15

Set aside a special place for Christ in your heart. Jesus is to be the Lord of our life. Christ through His presence gives us the power to respond to those who wish us to account for our faith. We are to do this with gentleness and respect. Christ enables us to be effective Ambassadors for Him and to present His message with the spirit of Love. Will you seek Christ's will for this to take place in your life?

The Testimony from Scripture

The key scriptural passages for evangelism are found in the Great Commission and in Christ's final words to the disciples prior to His ascension in Acts 1:8. Both begin with an assertion of power. Christ declared that He had all power in heaven and earth, and therefore He had the authority to give His disciples power. He told where and what their mission was to be. Their field of operation was the world. They were to teach for conversion symbolized by baptism. They were to teach obedience to His commandments. They were to give a witness and to be witnesses beginning where they were.

The word "witness" is used as both a noun and a verb. The disciples were witnesses because they had seen. The word also is used as a statement of truth. John was sent by God to bear witness in preparation for revelation in Christ. Paul called upon God as his witness. The Greek word for witness is *martus*; thus the word "martyr" was applied to those who gave their lives as a witness to Christ.

Jesus taught evangelism through such figures of speech as the metaphor, simile, and hyperbole imbedded in parables.

Matthew, Mark and Luke record the parable of the sower. Sometimes this is referred to as the parable of soils, for this is the

only variable in the parable—the sower is the same and the seed is the same. Jesus' application of this parable was to the hearers—to those who do not hear, to those whose understanding was shallow, to those whose lives are too cluttered as well as to those who do hear and produce. Every evangelist has to recognize that not all his labors produce fruit. Modern techniques of communications make it easier to sow the gospel message, or put in more modern terms, broadcast the Gospel and put it "on line," hoping that some of it will fall on good ground and yield fruit.

The parable of the sower takes on more meaning if one views it from the point of the sower. A good farmer selects where he sows seed. He does not scatter it on the highway. If the ground is hardpan, he plows and disks. If soil is rocky he picks up the stones. If there are thorns he removes them. The sower never forgets that growth is from God, but preparation, cultivation and harvest is man's responsibility.

The Testimony from History

Christian Evangelism began with those who had grown up in the teachings of the Old Testament and were gathered in a celebration of Pentecost. Though they came from all parts of the

known world, the Holy Spirit gave them understanding. The Gospel spread through the preaching of the Word as some three thousand were added following Peter's witness. The Gospel spread as the church appointed the first deacons from the laity. Philip was able to interpret the teaching of Isaiah as being fulfilled in Christ. One of the greatest evangelists was Paul, who was converted from an opponent of Christianity to its greatest supporter whose training was able to bridge the gap between the Jews and the Gentiles.

Often we think of Paul an itinerant missionary preaching from city to city, but his greatest impact upon Christianity was his writings. If he had not written letters to the churches and fellow Christians, how impoverished we would be. Similarly, the very life and teachings of Christ and the early church might have been lost had not Matthew, Mark, Luke and John put the pen to paper. Luke prefaced his writings by expressing to Theophilus that he had investigated everything from the beginning "so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:3-4, NIV).

The Dark Ages, in spite of its name, proved to be a time of germination. The writings of both the Old and New Testament were translated and cop-

ied. When the Protestant Reformation came in the 16th and 17th centuries, there was seed available in the Scriptures which produced an abundant harvest. It was from the reading of Scripture that Seventh Day Baptists had their beginnings.

Evangelism among Seventh day Baptists in early America was largely by colonization. As families migrated, they established churches. In 1802 a General Conference was organized to send missionaries to these scattered churches. The 1820s saw the beginnings of organized societies within the local churches and the Conference. The printing ministry of tracts and periodicals was targeted largely to the promotion of the Sabbath among other Christians. Some of this led to the adoption of the Sabbath by those who included this in the teachings of Adventism. Aside from the sending of missionaries to China and the Jewish people, most of the missions were in response to requests for assistance.

A Faith for Today

One definition of an evangelical is "emphasizing salvation by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ through personal conversation, the authority of the Scriptures and the importance of preaching as contrasted to ritual." However, Seventh Day

Baptists are evangelicals with a special emphasis on the authority of the Scriptures in teaching the observance of all that has been commanded.

Evangelism is a form of salesmanship. Many of the principles that make a good sales person can be applied to evangelism.

First, a good sales person must begin with a good product that meets a real need. The product that the evangelical promotes is salvation by faith in the atoning death of Christ. There is no question concerning the need of salvation for all of mankind. It is for this purpose that Christ came into the world. One does not have to look far to see the need. Seventh Day Baptists believe that a part of God's plan for man is the need for consecrated rest as a weekly reminder of God as the Supreme Creator and should not be replaced by a substitute or counterfeit. When God blessed the Sabbath, He put His trademark on it. No matter how much man has attempted to replace it with a substitute, no other day has that God-given blessing or command to remember it.

Secondly, a good sales person must personally be familiar with his product and able to articulate clearly its operation from his own experience. If I were buying a new car and noticed that most of the people working

at that dealership were driving a car made by another company, I would be hesitant to buy from that dealer. If I were hiring a tax consultant, I would expect him to be familiar with the tax code. Similarly, an evangelist should "practice what he preaches" and be familiar with God's code given in the Scriptures.

Thirdly, there is nothing like satisfied customers to clinch a sale. I have observed in one city a large turnover in some restaurants, while others have been in business for years. The difference is often the presence of satisfied customers who know they can get a good meal at a reasonable price. When people are well fed in a place that makes people feel welcome, you can find satisfied customers who return again and again.

Fourth, a good sales organization must have readily available service with personnel who can meet the needs of its customers. The apostles recognized this need by appointing deacons to meet the needs of the people so that they could spend their time in preaching the gospel. But at least two of them (Stephen and Philip) went way beyond "serving tables."

Fifth, there is the need to identify a target area for concentration of resources. The shotgun approach has its value in gaining name recognition, but it

is essential that a salesperson concentrate on those who are the likely prospects who will accept his product. Jesus told his disciples to go into the whole world, and this is still the ultimate objective. But he also told his disciples to begin where they were and then spread out. Paul began with people in the synagogue who were already familiar with the prophecies that were fulfilled in Christ. His entrance into Europe was at the invitation of one who said, "Come over into Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9, NIV). In Athens, Paul appealed to people who were curious about new ideas, and Paul turned this interest into a proclamation of the Gospel. Yet it was in Corinth that he shook his raiment and declared, "Henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6).

Finally, a salesperson must have flexibility in approach without compromise to his product. In 1890 a successful businessman, Henry Babcock, was president of the General Conference. In his opening address, he stated, "when one line of policy is followed for a fair length of time and found to fail or to be attended with less loss than gain, or where the gain is not commensurate with the amount of money and energy expended, the line of policy should be changed

for one better adapted to the end desired." With the new methods of communication now available and the mobility of people, some of the traditional evangelistic methods are no longer as effective as in the past. Changes can be made without violation to the essential message.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the Great Commission relate to your church covenant and practice?
2. With the wide use of the Internet, it is now possible to literally witness to the whole world. What are some ways Seventh Day Baptists are now using the Internet to sow seed.
3. Should we have target areas to sow the seed of the Gospel in order to reap greater harvest? If so, what are some of these areas for you, your church and the denomination?
4. Are you a good salesperson for the Gospel and our mission to the people with whom we have contact?
5. In what ways can the General Conference and its agencies assist in making our churches and its members more effective evangelists?

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Next Quarter's Lessons

Good News of Jesus

(The Gospel of Luke)

Unit I — A Savior is Born

- | | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 1. Preparing the Way (Luke 1:5-25; 3:2-3, 7-18) | December | 2 |
| 2. Responding to God (Luke 1:26-38) | December | 9 |
| 3. Praising God (Luke 1:39-55) | December | 16 |
| 4. A Savior is Born (Luke 2:4-20) | December | 23 |
| 5. Presented in the Temple (Luke 2:25-38) | December | 30 |

Unit II — Mission and Ministry

- | | | |
|--|---------|----|
| 6. Jesus in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-26, 28-30) | January | 6 |
| 7. The Cost of Discipleship (Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-33) | January | 13 |
| 8. Lost and Found (Luke 15:1-2, 11-24) | January | 20 |
| 9. Threat of Riches (Luke 16:1-13) | January | 27 |

Unit III — Cross and Resurrection

- | | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 10. Going to Jerusalem (Luke 18:31-34; 19:1-10) | February | 3 |
| 11. One Who Serves (Luke 22:14-30) | February | 10 |
| 12. Dying on a Cross (Luke 23:33-49) | February | 17 |
| 13. Witness to the Resurrection (Luke 24:33-49) | February | 24 |

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The Teaching Leader

Ernest K. Bee, Jr.

*"To know the Lord
is the goal and experience,
content and practice, of our faith."*

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The author is Ernest K. Bee Jr., who served the SDB Board of Christian Education as Executive Director for 15 years. He has worked with denominational agencies for more than 35 years. His graduate degrees were received from Alfred University (B.D., M.S.Ed.) and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (D.Min.).

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