Exalt God and call attention to the Christ-centered truths of His word, while making simple and plain the biblical basis of the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

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ADvindicate
Reasoning from Scripture

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ADvindicate seeks to publish Christ-centered, Bible-based, Seventh-day Adventist affirming articles on current events and issues within the church. This is a one time notification. If you would like to receive further notifications, please visit our website.

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Rules don’t matter

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The Sabbath: A day to celebrate

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“I just want you to know that I think you’re a very talented mother.” My friend continued speaking for a moment, and I almost dismissed her seemingly off-handed comment. I was about to begin a very long road trip and supposed that she was simply offering words of encouragement as an extension of her farewell. She began gesturing to my three young boys all buckled in their car seats. Then suddenly her meaning became clear.

“Right,” I interjected, cutting her off, “And I’ll have four kids when you do!” Though I’m positive she knew I was only half serious, she was overcome with joy. She laughed as she put her hands on her growing flanks, already four months down the pregnancy path.

“I will not forget this promise!” she offered with obvious excitement.

A week earlier, my three boys and I had driven from Minnesota to winter for a short time in Loma Linda, California. We were staying with my friend and her growing family. We have known each other since our teenage years and feel free to be candid. A few nights before leaving, she and I had indulged in a late night discourse. As every new mother knows, as soon as you have one baby, people want to know if you’re “done” and, if not, when the next one will be on the way. After attending several reunions of family and friends, the question presented itself on almost every occasion and then again on a deeper level as I sat with her late that evening.

“God said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply.’ It’s God’s will, you know,” she reminded me.

“Yes, I remember, but I’m not sure if He said that before or after the Fall.”

“I’m pretty sure God said it after the flood,” she responded.

Neither of us had exact Bible texts tripping off our tongues that night. But to bolster her argument, she offered the following additional reasons to convince me to have more children:

1. You are a Bible-believing, God-fearing Christian—an Adventist no less.
2. You have a college education (which I suppose she correlated with intelligence).
3. You are relatively stable financially (which as we all know can rapidly change).
4. You have good birthing hips (with which I unfortunately couldn’t argue!)
After listening to her rhetoric in favor of having more children, an eisegetical twist on Christ’s parable of the talents came to mind.

“So if you genuinely think that I am extra-ordinarily talented at having children, it only makes sense to interpret Christ’s parable substituting babies for money.”

“Exactly! You wouldn’t want to bury your talent for having children and be called an unfaithful steward, would you? You’ve got to invest that thing! You are a talented mother!”

“What’s the verse about children being a reward?”

“I don’t remember where it’s found, but a Bible text says that children are an ‘heritage’ of the Lord and that we are blessed if our ‘quiver’ is ‘full of them’.”

“I feel like my quiver is full with three boys, especially since they are so close in age.”

In the midst of our conversation, we were interrupted by a formerly sleeping child who needed assistance, and we each made for our own sleeping quarters.

The next day, a child’s birthday party inspired the ‘are you done?’ question by another friend.

“Oh yes, unless God blesses us with another one. We’re not planning on having any more, though. My husband is open to having more, so I told him that it’s his turn—he can have the next one.”

“You know, you really should pray about it. Your boys are wonderful, and you seem like you’re well-rested,” she told me. She then told of her ‘Spirit-led’ grandmother who gave birth to over ten children during a time when having such a large family was unpopular in her circle.

The same week I met a beautiful Mormon mother as I relaxed in a hot tub. She had three children with her which I later learned were less than half of her brood. I inquired about the practicality of having seven kids.

“When they’re small, it’s hard to keep things organized but it just gets better every day. It is so wonderful. You should think about having more,” she recommended.

I could not help but wonder if she were truly of the opinion that I should have more children just for the sake of having more, or if she really meant that I should have more children and become more Mormon. I reflected further on the idea of having more children just because one can, for the purpose of church growth, or even due to an official church position on birth control.

As an Adventist mother, it is a solemn responsibility to consider multiple dimensions when planning family size. Since the Adventist church does not express an official view on contraception, but rather prioritizes reasoning based on Biblical principles, it is imperative that we use our God-given faculties to help guide our decisions. There is more to consider than simply good birthing hips and a desire for more children. Further, it is important to remember
that we actually do have a choice in the matter. We are not necessarily predestined to have a certain family size by letting things simply move along naturally.

The question of how many children one should have needs to be carefully considered in the context of resource availability, social responsibility, considerations about character formation, and the ultimate destiny of the children we bring into this world. God has called us to think and plan and not simply to react. Though it would be far easier to have a clear-cut ecclesiastical mandate, it is actually more glorifying to God and Spirit-led to make intelligent decisions in the context of an active relationship with the Creator. In all aspects of our lives, and no less in family planning, God seems to be more interested in helping us work out the answers to our questions with sound reasoning than our simply succumbing to chance interpreted as His will.
The Bible: book of suggestions

Historically, Protestants have held a high view of the Scriptures. Parents taught children that the Bible was the inspired word of God, and that except for some possible scribal and translational errors (none of which affect any truths or teachings), it was God’s infallible word to humanity. For generations, a general unity of common doctrinal beliefs was the norm. The authority and jurisdiction of Scripture in the daily life of a Protestant was rarely questioned. A literal six-day creation, the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ, the reality of a visible second coming, the scriptures as the inerrant word of God, etc. were held to be sacrosanct by a majority of believers. However, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Rationalism, Empiricism, “Natural Theology,” etc. based on a Newtonian view of the universe, created a new paradigm of critical scholarship. These disciplines were based more on philosophy and subjectivity than faith. They challenged some of the foundational doctrines of the church, and in time they filtered down to the laity. By the second half of the twentieth century, an atmosphere of pluralism and disparity challenged long-held beliefs. As a result, many Christians today treat the Bible more as a book of suggestions and recommendations than a supernatural authority and guide to life.

At the heart of these divergent Scriptural world-views are the claims made by 2 Timothy 3:16,17. What is the “Scripture” Paul refers to here? Does this verse refer to “all” or just parts of it? What is ‘inspiration,’ and how does it affect the words of the Bible? Can I really trust every “jot and tittle” of Scripture? If I can’t, then who decides what part(s) of Scripture are inspired?

Not surprisingly, there have been some direct objections to the inspiration of Scripture from atheists. For example, renowned author and apologist Sam Harris wrote:

There are sections of the Bible that I think are absolutely brilliant and poetically unrivaled, and there are sections of the Bible which are the sheerest barbarism, yet profess to prescribe a divinely mandated morality—where do I start? Books like Leviticus and Deuteronomy and Exodus and First and Second Kings and Second Samuel—half of the kings and prophets of Israel would be taken to The Hague and prosecuted for crimes against humanity if these events took place in our own time.

Another popular atheist Richard Dawkins has quipped:
Insofar as theology studies the nature of the divine, it will earn the right to be taken seriously when it provides the slightest, smallest smidgen of a reason for believing in the existence of the divine. Meanwhile, we should devote as much time to studying serious theology as we devote to studying serious fairies and serious unicorns.

One would expect such critical objections coming from non-Christian, skeptical voices. However, coming from Christian sources, it becomes more alarming. Greek scholar Daniel Wallace wrote about the “quiet battle over [the] locus classicus of dogmatic theology” - namely 2 Timothy 3:16. RC Sproul has asserted that “liberal theology has made a strong impact on evangelical groups, particularly with an avalanche of criticism leveled against the trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible. The doctrine of inerrancy long upheld by Evangelicals [has come] under attack. . . Many individuals and institutions historically tied to Evangelicalism defected from the doctrine of inerrancy. Some opted for a watered-down view of ‘infallibility,’ while others sought a via media in the view of ‘infallibility.’”

In 2009, the Barna Group conducted research that dealt with attitudes regarding the inspiration and authority of Scripture. They reported, “[W]hile most Americans of all ages identify the Bible as sacred, the drop-off among the youngest adults is striking: 90% of Boomers (47-65 yrs old) described the Bible as sacred, while 81% of “Busters” (28-46) and just 67% of Mosaics (18-25).” The study went on to show that Young adults are “significantly less likely than older adults to strongly agree that the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches. Just 30% of Mosaics and 39% of Busters embraced this view- compared to 46% of Boomers and 58% of elders (66- up).” It should not be surprising to see what this leads to in terms of foundational truths. The study concludes that “among Mosaics, a majority (56%) believes the Bible teaches the same spiritual truths as other sacred texts.” These generational attitudes can be directly attributed to the view of “inspiration” of Scripture they hold.

When looking at different translations of 2 Timothy 3:16, it is truly amazing to see how three words (pasa graphe theopneusos) can have so many different renderings:

All Scripture is inspired by God (NAS, NLT, NRS)
Every Scripture is inspired by God (NET)
All Scripture is God-breathed (NIV)
Every Scripture inspired of God (ASV)
All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (KJV, NKJV)
Every inspired Scripture (NEB)
Every Scripture is breathed out by God (ESV)
Every writing is God-breathed (YLT)

The first word pasa (“all” or “every”) is an adjective. Furthermore, it is used without an article (“the“) in this verse. When it is used in this way, it means “every,” “every kind or variety.” Lexicographer Walter Bauer confirms this understanding when he says “in the singular. . . the individual members of the class [are] denoted by the noun- ‘every,’ ‘each all.’” In Clarkes Commentary, a similar observation is made, “‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God‘- This sentence is not well translated; the original πασα γραφη θεορ νευστος . . . should be rendered: ‘Every writing . . . is profitable for doctrine, etc.’”
It is noteworthy to see that many translations have recognized this rendering:

“Every scripture inspired of God . . .” (American Standard Version, 1901);
“Every holy Writing which comes from God . . .” (Basic English Bible);
“Every scripture is divinely inspired“ (Darby Bible Translation)
“Every Scripture is inspired by God . . .” (Weymouth Bible);
“Every Scripture is God-breathed . . .” (World English Bible);
“Every Writing [is] God-breathed. . .” (Youngs Literal Bible);
“Every scripture inspired of God . . .” (English Revised Version)

Therefore, the lexicographical and translational weight of evidence points to the opening word of 2 Timothy 3:16 to be rendered as “every”. This emphasizes the individual portions of Scripture rather than “scripture as a whole.”(13) The Bible is clear that the Scriptures are a “whole” made up of units (John 10:35). An understanding of pasa as “every” denotes that if one verse is inspired, all are. It strongly implies that “Inspiration” extends to every Word (Matt. 4:14) of Scripture—including every “jot or tittle”. Of course, we are not here promoting the concept of “verbal mechanical dictation” of Scripture ( a matter to be addressed in a subsequent article). Rather, we are stressing the vital necessity of taking seriously the fact the entire corpus of Scripture (i.e., “every” part of the Bible) is “inspired by God,” and is thus to be accepted as the infallible revelation of the Creator to His created beings.

Our daily decisions and actions constantly depend upon the meaning and application of the individual words in Scripture. Without this confidence, we will inevitably believe that the Bible only contains the word of God–but isn’t necessarily God’s word. In our next article, we will examine the second word in the phrase- pasa graphe theopnosis.

Footnotes

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Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

Gray smokey air circled thumping speakers. Occasional bursts of strobe light bounced off white shirts, sparkling on cheap jewelry. I was on the dance floor, intoxicated, as many Friday nights before.

One of the few nights I remember distinctly was that night. Time seemed to pause, and there was momentary quiet in my mind. I squinted through the haze to the bodies pulsing around me, now frozen.

“What are you doing here?” my conscience whispered.

In an instant of shame, I could feel the grief of my parents. Sadness started in my chest and slipped back down my throat as I swallowed.

“I don’t know,” I mumbled in reply.

Then the impression was gone. The music was back and the bodies continued to dance. My head spun, as I washed down my guilt with another bitter gulp.

But I knew one thing. Nothing was going to tie me to the rules of my parents, not anymore. I was done being different, being confined. And frankly, I liked this feeling of freedom.

St. Augustine said, “It is not reason which turns the young man from God; it is the flesh. Skepticism but provides him with the excuses for the new life he is leading.”

Excuses? Yep. I made almost every excuse in the book, even toying with agnosticism. The main reasons for my emotional hostility toward religion lurked at the doors of my childhood home, churches and schools.

I was aware of the sorrow I was causing my parents, but deep down, I wanted them to know this was their fault. Indeed, I had grown up in a home of theologically conservative parents, and even
though I felt lucky not being tethered to parents who took lifestyle habits to an extreme, I saw them as hypocritical.

Yes, in the area of religion, my perceptions led me to disrespect my parents. I also disliked the cliquish people in my small-town church, and I boiled when anyone even seemed to imply I was going to hell if I didn’t follow the rules. I questioned church doctrines, but instead of going to scripture for answers, I made up my own.

Thankfully my parents’ prayers never stopped on my behalf, even though I wasn’t worthy of their daily intercessions. Perhaps they heard, as St. Augustine’s mother did, “It is not possible that the [daughter] of such tears should be lost.”

Fast-forward four years to my spiritual re-beginning. When I asked, God picked up the fragments of my life and tenderly held them in His hand for repair. He nudged me back into the arms of my family, and with much weeping, as the prodigal, my troubles fell on compassionate ears.

Lamentations 3:31-33 says, “For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.”

Praise the Lord for hard times! There is no better opportunity to find Jesus or draw closer to Him than when we are allowed to be miserable on the wrong path.

Blinders slowly lifted from my spiritual vision, and I began seeing the answer to the Holy Spirit’s question years before — “What are you doing here?”

I was there because I thought rules mattered more than understanding Jesus’ love for me. I was there because I was self-centered and irresponsible. I was there because I let my judgments of my parents and church crowd my good sense. I was there because I was hurting.

If only Hebrews 12:2 had been opened to my understanding before. If I had fixed my eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of my faith, it might have saved me years of stupid choices and painful experiences. Instead, I looked at imperfect human beings as my examples of Christian living, and down the road of hostility I wandered.

As many before me, I finally realized rules didn’t matter, unless I loved the rule-giver. Rules didn’t matter, until I realized how much the rule-giver loved me. I had gotten things turned around, out of order, mixed up. I didn’t know Jesus, but I was trying to keep His rules anyway.

My pastor said, “If you’ve ever doubted His love for you, take time to look at the cross.” That’s exactly what I had to do. I searched for spiritual truths at the cross and found Jesus. Finally.

I found the law is love. The law is Jesus. I had separated the letter of the law from the spirit of the law, and in doing so, destroyed its power to have a saving influence on my life. The 10 commandments were made for me, to keep me socially and spiritually safe, happy and in connection with my Creator.
True, I will be judged by the law, but when I love Jesus, appearing before His judgment seat to give an account of every deed will be a joyful experience. I will be a law-keeper not because I was forced or badgered. I will be a law-keeper because it came joyfully from my heart full of thanks to the Lawgiver who saved me when I cried for help.
The Sabbath: A day to celebrate

As Seventh-day Adventists our observance of the seventh day Sabbath is a practice that sets us apart from most Christians, and this doctrine is embedded in the name of our Church. But is it possible that we observe the seventh day Sabbath without truly understanding or appreciating the wonderful attributes of God that this day represents? While it is true that God set apart the Sabbath day as His holy day, God also gave the Sabbath to us as a gift. Jesus tells us that “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27*). If we understood the significance of what we actually celebrate when observing the seventh day Sabbath, we would understand why the Sabbath is a gift. If those who consider us legalists because of our observance of the seventh day Sabbath understood all that the Sabbath represents, they would see something quite the opposite of legalism. The fourth commandment tells us that we honor God as creator when observing the seventh day Sabbath. “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:11). Celebrating God’s character is not the only reason for Sabbath observance. Other aspects of God’s character also give us cause for rejoicing on the Sabbath day.

Christ’s death on the cross reveals to us another aspect of God’s character that we celebrate when observing the Sabbath. Jesus could have died on any day of the week, but it was in God’s plan for Jesus to die on a Friday and to rest in the tomb over the Sabbath day. God not only emphasized the need to observe His law by orchestrating Christ’s death in this manner and having Jesus set an example of obedience to God’s divine precepts by resting during the Sabbath hours, but Jesus also sent another message to the world. This message can be heard in Christ’s dying words on the cross, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). In the 28th verse of the same chapter, John tells us that Jesus knew that all things were now accomplished. In John one we are told that Jesus was the one who created the earth. He created this world in six days, and when His work was completed, He rested on the seventh day. In like manner, Jesus completed His work of redeeming the human race on the sixth day of the week, and when all things were accomplished, He announced that His work was finished. He died and then rested in the tomb on the seventh day. Because of Christ’s death on the cross, all who accept God's grace will experience forgiveness and cleansing from sin. For this reason that we observe the Sabbath to celebrate God, not only as our creator, but as our redeemer. When Christ’s Sabbath rest was completed, He came forth from the grave and continued His work, which leads us to yet another aspect of God’s character that we celebrate by observing the Sabbath.
God reveals this aspect of His character regarding Sabbath worship in the book of Ezekiel. “Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them” (Ezekiel 12:20). God says the same thing in Exodus 31:13. Jesus presented to the world the same message about Himself as He did in Exodus and Ezekiel by healing people on the Sabbath. The people who lived in Christ’s time had a very distorted view of the Sabbath, because their religious leaders had turned the day God had given them as a gift into a burden. Jesus wanted to portray the Sabbath in its true light, and by healing people on the Sabbath He was declaring Himself to be the God who heals. When Christ paid the penalty for our sin on the cross, He earned the right to blot out our sins from remembrance. When He rose again, He earned the right to heal us and set us free from the enslavement of sin. In Heaven Christ continuously labors on behalf of the human race, granting forgiveness for all who take hold of His grace, and imparting to them His mind through the Holy Spirit, which enables them to live in perfect obedience to His commandments. This is the work that Christ began to do after His Sabbath rest in the tomb, once He ascended into Heaven. So when we observe the Sabbath, we are not only celebrating God as the creator and redeemer, we are also celebrating God as the restorer, because He restores us into His likeness—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. This is what righteousness by faith is all about, and it is all represented in the observance of the seventh day Sabbath.

The Bible uses the number seven to represent completeness, and in the light of the seventh day Sabbath we can see the complete work that God longs to accomplish in every human life. At the end of time, God will have a sealed people who completely reflect His perfect character, and the observance of the seventh day Sabbath will be the sign of God’s sealed people, setting them apart from the rest of the world. This sealing, however, will not be accomplished by trying to keep the Sabbath as perfectly as possible. If we are keeping the Sabbath as a means of obtaining Salvation, we are actually not keeping the Sabbath at all, because we are denying God the redeemer, the one who saves us by grace through faith and not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus tells us that without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). If we try to keep the Sabbath in our own strength, refusing to admit that our ability to obey God’s commandments comes through God’s power alone, we are not keeping the Sabbath, because we are denying God the restorer. The Sabbath is a representation of the righteousness by faith message, and the observance of the seventh day Sabbath by God’s end time people will be the sign that His people accept this message. By keeping the Sabbath, we as God’s people are acknowledging that we cannot save ourselves or change ourselves, and through Sabbath worship we are giving allegiance to the only one who can create, redeem, and restore us. True Sabbath worship is not the means of obtaining salvation but rather the result of obtaining salvation. Those who knowingly reject the seventh day Sabbath and practice Sunday worship are actually promoting legalism, because they are choosing to worship God on a day set aside by a religious system that teaches salvation by works.

The seventh-day Sabbath doctrine is one of the doctrines that critics of Adventism point to when accusing Adventists of legalism, and tragically, many of us as Adventists give our critics a basis for their accusations. We make the same mistake as the Jewish leaders of old by turning God’s gift into a burden, and and this legalism is the picture of Sabbath worship we present to the world. We have guidelines that indicate what we should and should not do on the Sabbath, and we go through the same Sabbath routine every week—Sabbath school, church service, potluck,
Bible study—trying our best to abide by these guidelines. I strongly believe that the Sabbath absolutely must be observed in a holy manner. God gave the commandment not to work on the Sabbath for a reason. Many things might shift our focus away from God if we took part in them on His holy day. However, if we observe the Sabbath in the light of the cross, appreciating and taking hold of all that the Sabbath represents, we would keep the Sabbath day holy out of a heart flowing with gratitude to God for what He has done for us and continues to do for us. We would not need to keep a checklist of what to do and not to do on the Sabbath, because the grace of God in our hearts would cause the observance of the Sabbath day in a holy manner to come naturally to us, and we would truly worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). The world needs to see this picture of the Sabbath, and when we as Adventists fulfill our responsibility to the world by sharing this picture through our words and actions, many of those who are currently repulsed by the seventh day Sabbath doctrine will ultimately be drawn by it. The doctrine that they now see as representing legalism they will come to see as representing liberty, and they will join with us in celebrating the everlasting gospel on God’s holy day.

*All Scriptures are taken from the New King James Version.*

**Stephanie Dawn** is the vocalist for **Dawn of Hope Ministry.** The mission of this music ministry is to proclaim the everlasting gospel through spoken word and song.
Oh no! Not another genealogy

Genealogies, at least in the scripture sense and usage, are out of fashion these days. By many the past is considered an imposition, its categories too confining for a liberated age, its conceptions irrelevant. And yet the very societies that would cut the umbilical cord of the past bare already suffering the results of their false bids for freedom. Yawn though we may when wading into a scripture genealogy, the genealogies may yet prove a salve of great importance to the post-modern soul.

A ready test for this proposition can be found in Matthew’s gospel. By including a genealogy he allows us to explore its meaning for the Jews, for Jesus, and then by way of application for ourselves.

Genealogies and the Jews

A genealogy will say nothing to us if we just read it as a list of names. It falls flat. It fails its purpose. But it was never meant to be a mere list of names. It was a tool which was used to shape identity, the primary tool. Genealogies for the ancient peoples preserved important continuities and validated connections. Roles and responsibilities, possessions, prerogatives, and commitments—all of these were rooted in the family and its history.

Though by no means exclusive to the Jews, genealogies held a meaning for the Jew to which others could not lay claim. For only the Jews by way of divine revelation possessed a true account of beginnings. Which meant in turn that only the Jews had access to a true understanding of history and to the pattern that history should follow. Like we said above, roles and responsibilities, possessions, prerogatives, and commitments all depend upon a genealogy that is properly rooted.

Matthew demonstrates a clear sensitivity to these very points for he begins his gospel with the phrase “the book of the genealogy.” This phrase, as it is in the Greek original, only appears in the same precise form in two other verses of the Bible, Genesis 2:4 and 5:1. The first speaks of the “book of the genealogy of the heavens and the earth” and the second of the “book of the genealogy of Adam,” both of which are foundational to the whole of human history and represent the ultimate point of beginning.
But the connection that Matthew makes grows even richer when we consider the Hebrew word toledot which stands behind the Septuagint translation. Toledot appears 10 times in the Genesis narratives and serves as an organizing principle for the whole. It comes from a root meaning “to bear” or “to generate,” but its emphasis goes beyond the mere act of begetting to include all that develops after a begetting has taken place. It is a this-is-what-came-of-it type of idea. Both beginnings and endings (in the sense of the cumulative effect of a lived history) are thus bound firmly together, and it is the genealogy that represents and preserves the sense of this close connection between the original creation and all that developed (or should have developed) out of it.

Thus the concept rooted in the word toledot binds together not just the two poles of history; it also binds man to God and God to man. Genesis makes clear that the begetting of men is only possible because of the initial begettting of God. He begets first (Genesis 2:4). He is the initiator, the one who wills the world and its creatures into existence. Only subsequently are we able to beget (Genesis 5:1) with a begetting that is inescapably rooted in the original creation. Our own begetting is always on a stage and within a life that has been gifted to us and that is sustained by another, namely our Creator.

Furthermore in this binding of man’s begetting to God’s begetting, it becomes clear that human history can only reach its proper fulfillment when it is pregnant with the divine intent, the intent that motivated and guided God in His original act of creation.1 With this in mind it becomes possible to speak of true history as opposed to false, true history being histories the development of which are patterned after the creation intent.

The Jews were keenly aware that their own history had fallen short of this ideal. Yet even that imperfect history gave witness to the ongoing faithfulness of God in continuing to act and move towards the re-establishment of that which He had envisioned in His original act of “begetting.”

It was the memory and practice of this creation pattern that the Jews were called to preserve, and the genealogy was the record through time of that commitment of faith as well as a vehicle of transmission to the generations to come. It was a this-is-who-we-are kind of document which went back through all the ages so that identity and commitment were rooted in the being of God Himself.

Genealogies and Jesus

Reading Matthew’s genealogy it becomes readily apparent that Jesus lived out His life in the context of a received heritage. He was part of a history. He was defined and shaped by what had come before, and he not only accepted that which had come before but embraced it so that it came to define his very identity. Hyperbole acknowledged, we may still assert without departing from the truth that the genealogy made Him what He was.

It is not a mere conservatism, however, which compelled Jesus in this direction but rather a particular conception of history, as we have worked out above. In other words, Jesus would not have embraced any heritage but only this heritage. He understood that it was his unique role to both redeem and establish the God-begotten history to which the Jews had given witness. This
He did by being the first to fully realize the divine intent, an intent which included, as an integral part, absolving on the cross the guilt and shame of the family of which he had become a part.

In accepting this heritage and allowing it to define for him his roles and responsibilities, possessions, prerogatives, and commitments, Jesus became more not less. He was shaped by a family history in which God had played an integral part, and this rooted His identity not in the narrow scope of the self and of selfhood but in the purposes of God as they had been revealed down through the centuries and epochs of time.

**Genealogies and Ourselves**

As was stated in the introduction, many today consider the past to be an imposition. One of the central tenants of the philosophical movement dubbed post-modernism is that the self should be absolutely free to create itself. It was a conviction long in coming, simply the last step in a series of steps taken by western societies in which man replaced God at the center of man’s world.

But is man truly able to shoulder this God-sized burden? Political commentator Walter Lippman, writing in 1964, spoke of the “despair” and “spiritual unease” which even then had begun to afflict the West. “The malady is caused, I believe, by the impact of science upon religious certainty, and of technological progress upon the settled order of family, class, and community.” Lippman follows with a striking description of the post-modern dilemma. This despair, he says, “comes from being uprooted, homeless, naked, alone and unled. It comes from being lost in a universe where the meaning of life and of the social order are no longer given from on high and transmitted from ancestors but have to be invented and discovered and experimented with, each lonely individual for himself.”

What is being described by Lippman is the complete loss of the perspective set forth in Matthew’s genealogy. It is in just such a context that the message of the genealogy becomes imperative. Next month I will explore the implications of that loss and the response which we as believers should make to it.
Pain, intellect and the faith experience

Greg was a close friend in late high school years. Our fathers knew each other well and had forged a relationship largely over their study of the Bible and some shared personal struggles. Greg had grown up in a fractured home and had early turned to substance use as a way to escape the chaos of his environment and the emotional pain he found unbearable. In tenth grade, he turned to God in dramatic fashion. He and several of his friends had been “saved” in connection with a rapidly growing charismatic church movement in our small mountain community. It was an emotional time to be sure, but it resulted in a radical re-definition of Greg’s priorities. He significantly changed his outward appearance, began studying the Bible and sharing with others. He got busy correcting what had sadly gone awry in his academic performance and sought forgiveness from those he had used and abused. He attended several churches regularly in his desperate search for the truth.

After nearly two years, he drifted back to occasional drug use and then scrapped his faith experience altogether. I had many long conversations with him during this time, and what emerged as a consistent pattern over several months and then years was not his rational arguments against Christianity, but the difficulty he had getting his emotions to line up with what he believed. He maintained that the truth had not changed and that his rational understanding of it had not really changed either. However, the gulf between his intellectual faith and his unmet emotional needs had widened considerably to the point where he could no longer align himself with the truth he claimed to believe. In a frustrating spiral of guilt and depression, he walked away from Christianity.

Tom was another friend whose intellectual gifts I greatly admired. The first time we met, he introduced himself as a logical positivist. He was very well-read and could eloquently support his intellectual position. As an adherent to positivism, particularly as re-shaped by the Vienna Circle, he had no time for spiritual considerations and maintained an intensely skeptical stance toward his emotions. He gave a wide berth to questions of an ethical nature and pitched thoughts about the meaning of life onto his personal rubbish heap.

Our paths crossed at a time when he began experiencing, much to his consternation, a monumental struggle with existential questions. He expressed the realization that, abhorrent as it was to him, his entire course in life for the previous 18 months had been governed by his emotions and not by his reason. Blind-sided by the chaos that erupted in his life, he concluded that his subjective experience had exerted such force against his rational belief system that he
was literally in physical and psychological tatters. And as a cruel twist, he had not even recognized it until his very life was in jeopardy. Over the course of our many conversations during this time, he came to the difficult conclusion that he would have to reconstruct his library, not to mention his philosophy, since he had been trying unsuccessfully to avoid types of evidence other than the purely scientific. He still made absolutely no allowance for God, but his experience caused him to recognize that there may be other ways of framing and experiencing reality. He had been devastated by the force his emotional life had had on his intellectual fortress.

Recently I re-read the story of Adam and Eve after the fall. I was especially intrigued by the part where they attempt to hide from the omniscient God. Why did they hide? Because they were ashamed. It was the emotionally powerful experience of shame and guilt that caused them to turn from God. As I kept reading, several days later I encountered the story of the newly released band of Israelite slaves in the wilderness crying for return to Egypt. The visible presence of God in the cloud and the fire, food from the sky and a not so distant experience of crossing the red sea had very quickly been eclipsed by a palpable emotional darkness reminiscent of the plague that the Egyptians had been exposed to. They were quite ready to dispense of their belief in God’s provision, not for lack of evidence, but due to emotional and physical discomfort. Their faith, despite very strong evidence, had been trumped by feelings. And this is to say nothing of recounting the emotionally driven experiences of David, Job and Jonah.

Perhaps this is why God has chosen to speak to humanity in narrative form, rather than handing us a scientific and philosophical tome, a distillate of eternal and incontrovertible evidence. What we feel and experience changes how we relate to God and to the truth. Our feelings change the way we respond to evidence, change the way we ask questions and frame our arguments and determine how we ultimately conceive of reality. Narrative evokes identification and emotion. Narrative is messy. Narrative speaks to who we are, what we’ve become and where we are going.

2 Timothy 3 describes the state of humanity in the last days. It describes a society ruled completely by its desires and those who are “[. . .] always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (ESV). In college I read James Joyce’s semi-autobiographical novel, A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man, at the bidding of a friend who “believed” in atheism. It highlights critical moments in the life of Stephen, the young protagonist and his ultimate disavowal of his previously cherished faith. In the context of his known character flaws and flagrant sexual sins, he encounters a brief revival of his Catholicism. He listens to a series of sermons that changed, at least for a time, his course of action. “The next day brought death and judgment, stirring his soul slowly from its listless despair. The faint glimmer of fear became a terror of spirit as the hoarse voice of the preacher blew death into his soul (85). The preacher catalogues the horrors of hell where, […] “the damned, the prisoners are heaped together […] so utterly bound and helpless that […] they are not able even to remove from the eye a worm that gnaws it” (pp.91, 92). Joyce describes the eerie darkness of the fire that burns without light and the torture of an eternity plagued by a revolted conscience. Stephen is convinced and repents. In the end, however, he comes to the final realization that he simply cannot believe. His emotions, toyed with and tricked into believing in a god who uses gratuitous torture, finally cooled. And now, what was offended and revolted was his reason.
Greg admits that his decision to leave the faith was not evidence-based. He simply could not reconcile his sinful desires, his deep emotional pain and his intellectual understanding of the truth. Tom is still in a state of emotional shock that pure science and logic simply cannot satisfy. And Joyce has locked his protagonist forever in unbelief. When Paul asks us to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith, I believe he is asking for a thorough examination, our emotions included. Adventism encompasses the whole of life from a healthy lifestyle to eschatology. But for some of us, our faith has become frighteningly academic.

Our soul hunger, our deep human pain, is often left untouched. As apologetic methods are honed and evidence is weighed, as rightly it should be, we are experiencing a backlash to a scientific and intellectual approach to faith. As I have listened to people’s stories a theme has emerged. While emotions should ultimately be guided by reason, they often are not. And a cold, intellectual faith that doesn’t reach deep inside and acquaint us with the living Christ will ultimately prove no match for the hurt we all experience that cries out for healing. What we hold dear can very easily be compromised by what we do not address in ourselves and others. If we remain unaware of the potential force of our emotions to overwhelm our intellect, we are left in a vulnerable position which could have eternal consequences.
The word “postmodern” is often used to describe the age in which we live as if the hand on a great cosmic clock struck “Postmodern” at the turn of the 20th century. The implication, of course, is that anything that’s not postmodern is outdated. Let’s take a step back, though, and analyze this term so glibly invoked for so many applications.

The philosopher Jean Baudrillard used Disneyland as a metaphor for the postmodern world, (1) and I find it to be the clearest explanation of what postmodernism really teaches. Here is my version:

The throngs of eager Disneyland visitors know full well that the park is a false reality. The Mickey walking around is clearly not the real Mickey—in fact, there is no real Mickey. Tomorrowland clearly does not depict a real place or time. The whole park is filled with concrete portrayals of things that were, originally, figments of imagination. Each concrete portrayal symbolizes a thing that does not exist. Each symbol points to nothing. The creators of the park, however, have invented a game in which people pretend that the symbols point to real things. The visitors, by playing the game, can leave their lives in the world outside and immerse themselves in this false reality created for their amusement.

Here’s the key to understanding all things postmodern: the world outside the park is no different than the unreal world inside the park. The only reason we think it is different, according to the postmodernists, is that we haven’t realized that all of the symbols on which we base our reality point to nothing. Among these symbols are the words we use, the education we get, the theories we hold, the money we earn (they have a point there); and the religion we value.

Here’s another way to look at it. Imagine you walk into a Catholic church, and each wall is lined with images of the saints. With a proper understanding of the state of the dead, you know that those images do not actually point to saints up in Heaven—at best, they point to nothing. (2) Again, they symbolize things that do not exist. The postmodern philosopher would say that those images of the saints mean something because the people that worship those images, by their belief in them, give them meaning. The difference between the Disneyland visitors and the people praying to the saints is that the Disneyland guests (we hope) realize that they participate
in a false reality. Likewise, all the symbols on which our society is based only mean something in the sense that we, by our collective consent, impart meaning to them.

How did society arrive at this postmodern age? According to the philosophers, when the clock struck “Postmodern,” it chimed “God is dead!”(3) “God is dead” may seem like a strange way to phrase the belief that God does not exist, but it describes quite well the philosophy behind it. Keep in mind that, according to this philosophy, all things receive their meaning by human consent and belief. God, as a construct, ‘died’ when humanity (with the help of Marx, Freud, Darwin, and others) finally realized that He did not exist. “God is dead” means that God never existed except as a figment of our collective imaginations, and now we have ceased believing in the reality of our imaginings. Postmodernism, then, is a logical outcome of the breed of materialism that rejects the existence of all things outside of the material world.(4)

2 If I remember correctly, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan used this metaphor to explain postmodernism.
3 The second installment of this article will further pursue the relationship between atheism and postmodernism.
4 There are many different types of materialism, and some might allow for the existence, but not the action, of a supernatural or preternatural being. For the purpose of my argument, there is no difference.
Unbelievers often point to the failure of the Bible to condemn slavery as a proof that the Bible is uninspired, a merely human, culture-bound product of its times. They reason that a just and loving God would never countenance slavery, much less issue a series of regulations for the operation of such an institution. But what does Scripture actually say, and what type of institution does it regulate?

There have been many forms of slavery—slavery in one form or another has been almost ubiquitous since civilization began—yet most people are familiar with only one form of slavery, namely the transport of Africans to the Americas for work on plantations. Slave hunters would kidnap blacks from the African interior and march them to slave auction sites on the coast, where they would then be sold to white sea captains for transport and resale in the Western Hemisphere. Trafficking in African slaves involved unspeakable brutality that, by some estimates, resulted in the death of between 5 and 10 people for each slave who reached a plantation in the New World. But we must be clear at the outset that Scripture affords no hint of approval for this type of slavery.

The “slavery” regulated in the Old Testament does not include kidnapping people for sale as slaves. In fact, the Bible insists on the death penalty for those who enslave people against their will. Exodus 21:16 states, “Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death.” Deuteronomy 24:7 states, “If a man is caught kidnapping one of his brother Israelites and treats him as a slave or sells him, the kidnapper must die.” The New Testament also condemns those who steal people to sell them into slavery. 1 Timothy 1:10 includes “menstealers” (KJV) in a list of immoral and lawless persons that includes people who murder their own parents. In other translations, the term menstealers is translated as “kidnappers,” “slave traders,” “who sell slaves,” “who buy and sell slaves,” etc.

There is no question where the Bible stands regarding those who kidnap and enslave: they are strongly condemned, and ideally their fate should be death. Since the “peculiar institution” practiced by Americans as recently as the 19th Century is clearly condemned in Scripture, what type of institution did the Bible prescribe for ancient Israel?

Ancient Israel was an agrarian nation; the key to wealth was ownership of land. It was not God’s plan that there be any poor in Israel. (Deut. 15:4) Israel was to avoid a permanent underclass primarily by the repatriation of ancestral lands on the Year of Jubilee, every 50 years (Lev. 25:8-
No family could permanently alienate (sell) its ancestral lands, hence there could never be a permanent underclass of poor, landless peasants. In addition to repatriation of ancestral lands, the Bible provided several other protections for the poor, including a prohibition on charging them interest (Lev. 25:35-37); cancellation of debts every seventh year; leaving the edges of fields unharvested for the poor to glean; not harvesting the vine a second time (Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut. 15; 24:19); and leaving fields unplanted every seven years and allowing the poor to eat whatever grew on them naturally during that sabbath year (Ex. 23:10-11).

Strange as it sounds to us, for the Israelites slavery was to function as an additional protection for the poor; it was a way that the truly destitute could avoid death by starvation. People sold themselves into slavery, could not be resold, and had to be freed after 6 years of service, or at the Year of Jubilee, whichever came first (Lev. 25:39-43; Ex. 21:2; Deut. 15:12). Only if the slave swore before a judge that he was happy and wanted the arrangement to continue, could his station be made permanent with a symbolic ear-piercing (Ex. 21:5-6; Deut. 15:16-17).

Any master who killed his slave was subject to a punishment of death (Ex. 21:12, 20), a master who disfigured a slave by knocking out an eye or a tooth was to free the slave immediately (Ex. 21:26-27), and runaway slaves were not to be returned to their masters (Deut. 23:15-16). The slave was always entitled to buy his own freedom or have it bought for him by his kinsman-redeemer (Lev. 25:47-54). Of course, slaves were not to work on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10; 23:12; Deut. 5:14).

These stipulations made the “slavery” practiced by Israel very different from that practiced in the other nations of the ancient Near East, and quite different from what the term _slavery_ brings to our minds. Scripture was clear as to how Israelites were to treat those whose economic circumstances had forced them into slavery:

“Suppose some of your people become so poor that they have to sell themselves and become your slaves. Then you must treat them as servants, rather than as slaves. And in the Year of Celebration they are to be set free, so they and their children may return home to their families and property. I brought them out of Egypt to be my servants, not to be sold as slaves. So obey me, and don’t be cruel to the poor” (Lev. 23:39-43 CEV).
Branding 101 for the remnant church

One of the greatest statements I heard from Steve Jobs was, “It's really hard to design products by focus groups. A lot of times, people don’t know what they want until you show it to them” (Steve Jobs, Business Week, May 25 1998).

The Bible says in Luke 16:8, “And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light” (NASB).

Growing up a Seventh-day Adventist, I have seen the church go from knowing where it was going to appearing to be groping in the dark looking for light. I guess the picture of Jesus in Revelation 3:20 knocking on the door wanting someone to let him in is more applicable than I realized.

Seventh-day Adventists more than perhaps any organization in history have some big milestones that set them apart and put them on a special mission. The church believes the three messages of Revelation 14: 6-10 are the mission statement of the church. The church believes it is to complete the mission that the Protestant Reformation began. The church is the last bastion of hope in Protestantism that still protests all of the evils of the Roman church.

So that being said, this is a church with a mission statement to reveal to the world the character of God in the time of Judgment (1st angel’s message). This is a church to call people out of the confusion of the false religions, confused denominations, and false hope of the rat race that the world offers (2nd angel’s message). This is a church to tell people that the greatest conspiracy in the history of the war between good and evil is about to take place when all humanity will wage war against those who desire to trust in the Invisible rather than the proposed reality of earthly peace (3rd Angel’s Message).

A church with those mandates, you would think, stands out like a sore thumb with its brand. When we think of Apple, we think of a clean store with top notch products that are easy to understand. We think of products that just make sense and work like one would intuitively think they would.

As I look at the “remnant” of Revelation 12:17, I see a church with a major branding dilemma on its hands. First, I have a problem with the change of the logo of the church. We had for many
years a logo that revealed our mission statement: three angels flying in the sky with trumpets to declare those three vital messages. Today we have a flame that some argue looks just like every other denomination and is in essence a watering down of our distinctiveness. I am not going to debate the behind-the-scenes of the change, but what I will say is with the brand, our mark seems to signal a change in mission.

Today, we find few men willing to boldly declare that we are just as opposed to Catholicism and the errors that have crept into modern Christianity in North America as were the reformers of the Reformation or the pioneers of Adventism. We used to be a people known for being deep Bible students. Today, in most churches you won’t find many members with a Bible.

I recently offered on two different occasions to two different groups of Adventist high school students an offer of $100 to anyone who would get up right then and sufficiently defend just one of any of the 28 stated fundamental beliefs of the Adventist church. Not one on either occasion for $100 was bold enough to even attempt it. I would have been lenient.

As with any good business, it is branding 101 to know what your mission is and to use that in all your marketing and programming and planning. I look back to the past few months and even as this article is being written, we saw one of our premier institutions, Oakwood University, inviting a preacher that vehemently preaches against the Sabbath to come and teach preachers about good leadership. Would Martin Luther have invited some of the Jesuits to come and teach his Protestant students about the errors of Protestantism? How about the latest issue with the Andrews Seminary inviting a man that is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and one of the greatest leaders in the ecumenical movement to come share a lecture on “The Ecumenical Movement and Why You Should Be Involved”?

It is time we as a movement get back to the roots of what this movement is all about. If we no longer believe these three messages are for us, then let’s throw them out and join Rome. I think God has something better in store for us than that plan. For that reason, I love my church and will stay in it until Christ comes to take us home forever.