Creeds and Fundamental Beliefs

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By Sean Pitman: There are many people who think that the “Fundamental Beliefs” of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have turned into a kind of creed or unchangeable set of doctrinal beliefs or Biblical interpretations that supersede the Bible itself in importance and authority. It has...

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By Sean Pitman:

There are many people who think that the “Fundamental Beliefs” of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have turned into a kind of creed or unchangeable set of doctrinal beliefs or Biblical interpretations that supersede the Bible itself in importance and authority. It has therefore been
suggested that the Adventist Church is in danger of falling into the same trap that other Christian denominations and religious organizations have fallen into, of making human interpretations and traditions superior to the Bible as its own creed and interpreter.

Is this true? Has the Adventist Church truly diverged from the foundational protestant statement, “We have no creed but the Bible”? Are the efforts of those of us who manage this website to promote, within our own schools and churches, the teachings and authority of the basic fundamental goals and ideals of the church, as an organization, way off base? – at conflict with the concept of the Bible as its own interpreter for each individual? There are those who think so. Consider, for example, the following comment recently posted to this forum:

I am happy for the church to state what they believe as well, but the minute the church starts to do what Educate Truth is advocating, demanding orthodoxy as a test of fellowship and employment, then you have crossed over the line. The church no longer believes the “The Bible and the Bible Only”, because it is usurping the role of the Holy Spirit to interpret the Bible to each individual, and to bring conviction. Instead of allowing the Bible to be broadly interpreted as needed to meet peoples need, the creed limits the Bible to one narrow understanding which may not be where the Holy Spirit is going in some people’s lives. At the very least, the church is putting itself in the place of God by attempting to coerce thought and belief. Coercion is Satan’s tactic, not God’s. (Link)

This individual is not alone in his concerns over this issue. This was also the basic concern of the founders of the Adventist Church. Many of the founding fathers, and mothers, of our church had been active and devoted members of other protestant churches. When they had come upon what they believed to be new light from the Bible, which happened to conflict with the creeds of their own churches, they were removed from fellowship with the church families that they loved. They therefore originally thought of creedal statements, and even church organization, as entirely evil and fought very hard to prevent the early Adventist movement from organizing or forming official creedal statements of belief. This feeling has continued within our church to one degree or another and is often cited as a basis for allowing fundamentally divergent views to be preached and taught within our churches and schools.

For example, in support of allowing paid SDA representatives to teach fundamentally diverging opinions, Randal Wisbey, current president of La Sierra University, has quoted J.N. Loughborough in his 1861 statement regarding the issue of Church order and government:

J.N. Loughborough
The first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth is to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And, fifth, to commit persecution against such.\(^{(1)}\)

The problem, of course, is that Wisbey and others who reference the founding fathers of the church with regard to church order and government fail to reference Loughborough’s 1907 work, *The Church, Its Organization, Order and Discipline*. Although originally opposed to such constraints, it was John Loughborough, together with James White, who first started to realize the need for some sort of internal enforcement of Church order and discipline – i.e., an actual Church government.

As our numbers increased, it was evident that without some form of organization, there would be great confusion, and the work could not be carried forward successfully. To provide for the support of the ministry, for carrying on the work in new fields, for protecting both the church and ministry from unworthy members, for holding church property, for the publication of the truth through the press, and for other objects, organization was indispensable.\(^{(2)}\)

Of course, those who were not considered to accurately represent the views of the early Adventist Church did not receive “cards of commendation”. And what was the attitude of such persons? according to Loughborough?:

Of course those who claimed “liberty to do as they pleased,” to “preach what they pleased,” and to “go when and where they pleased,” without “consultation with any one,” failed to get cards of commendation. They, with their sympathizers, drew off and commenced a warfare against those whom they claimed were “depriving them of their liberty.” Knowing that it was the Testimonies that had prompted us as a people to act, to establish “order,” these opponents soon turned their warfare against instruction from that source, claiming that “when they got that gift out of the way, the message would go unrestrained to its ‘loud cry.’”

One of the principal claims made by those who warred against organization was that it “abridged their liberty and independence, and that if one stood clear before the Lord that was all the organization needed,” etc… Upon this point, when church order was contested, we read: “Satan well knows that success only attend order and harmonious action. He well knows that everything connected with heaven is in perfect order, that subjection and thorough discipline mark the movements of the angelic host. . . . He deceives even the professed people of God, and makes them believe that order and discipline are enemies to spirituality; that the only safety for them is to let each pursue his own course. . . . All the efforts made to establish order are considered dangerous, a restriction of rightful liberty, and hence are feared as popery.”\(^{(3)}\)

When those who back in the “sixties” [1860s] witnessed the battle of establishing church order now hear persons, as conscientious no doubt as those back there, utter almost the identical words that were then used by those opposing order, it need not be wondered that they fear the result of such statements as the following: “Perfect unity means absolute independence, – each one knowing for himself. Why, we could not have outward disorganization if we all believed in the Lord. . . . This question of organization is a simple thing. All there is to it is for each individual to give himself to the Lord, and then the Lord will do with him just what he wants to, and that all the time. . . . Our only safety, under God, is to go back to the place where God is able to take a multitude of people and make them one, without parliamentary rules, without committee work, without legislation of any kind.” – General Conference Bulletin of 1899.
Superficially considered, this might seem to be a blessed state, a heaven indeed; but, as already noted on a preceding page, we read of heaven itself and its leadings that “the god of heaven is a god of order, and he requires all his followers to have rules and regulations to preserve order.” (2)

Yet Wisbey, and others, often quote Ellen White, of all people, in support of “progressive” Adventism where the maintenance of internal church doctrinal standards is viewed as quite harmful to growth, akin to what the Catholic Church did to Galileo:

There is no excuse for anyone to take the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that our expositions of the Scripture are without error. (1, 4)

Such “progressive” individuals fail to note that although Ellen White does indeed use the phrase “unity in diversity,” (5) and stated that “Instructors in our schools should never be bound about by being told that they are to teach only what has been taught hitherto,” (6) she also maintained that the landmarks and pillars of Adventist truth were to remain. Concepts that impact the science of geology which she “was shown” to be identified as permanent include the concept of six literal, empirical, historical 24-hour days of creation, culminating with a literal 24-hour Sabbath day of rest, and that life on earth was non-existent before the literal creation week described in Genesis. (7)

She also writes that no one is to go ahead or fall behind the current leading of God in the understanding of the Church as an organized body and expect to remain a recognized part of that body.

God is leading out a people, not a few separate individuals here and there, one believing one thing, another that. Angels of God are doing the work committed to their trust. The third angels is leading out and purifying a people, and they should move with him unitedly. Some run ahead of the angels that are leading His people; but they have to retrace every step, and meekly follow no faster than the angels lead… (8)
The Word of God does not give license for one man to set up his judgment in opposition to the judgment of the church, neither is he allowed to urge his opinions against the opinions of the church. If there were no church discipline and government, the church would go to fragments; it could not hold together as a body. There have ever been individuals of independent minds, who have claimed that they were right, that God has especially taught, impressed, and led them. Each has a theory of his own, views peculiar to himself, and each claims that his views are in accordance with the Word of God. Each one has a different theory and faith, yet each claims special light from God. These draw away from the body, and each one is a separate church of himself. All these can not be right, yet they all claim to be led of the Lord. The word of inspiration is not yea and nay, but yea and amen in Christ Jesus. (9)

How are those who think themselves so “progressive” in advance of the foundational pillars of the organized SDA Church on such basic fundamental issues going to be remotely capable of “bringing our young people home at the end of the day?”,(10) as Elder Paulsen put it, if they don’t really believe in or see evidence for the home message to begin with? Ultimately, is there to be no real accountability to the organized SDA Church for what is presented as “truth” from either pulpit or classroom? – by paid representatives supported by God’s own monies in the forms of tithes and offerings? Such a perspective does not lead to growth, but to chaos and anarchy and eventual fragmentation of any organization. For any organization to remain viable, internal order and discipline must be maintained. This is not the same situation as occurred between the Catholic Church and Galileo where the Church thought to take on political and civil powers over all peoples. That is never a good idea and is the very reason for the need of separation between church and state. People should always be free to join or to leave any religious organization at will without any repercussions under civil law. However, this isn’t to say that internal government within the church is also dangerous or that it is unnecessary. To the contrary, without the enforcement of internal order and government upon certain core principles and ideals, no organization of any kind could exist. The order and government of the Adventist Church is itself inspired by God and in keeping with the general harmony and order that is displayed in Heaven. God is a God of order and government. He is not a God of chaos and anarchy.

The viability of the SDA Church, as an organization inspired by God, and the developing minds of a generation of SDA young people, is in our hands.

1. **Dwyer, Bonnie.** In the Eye of the Storm. 4, s.l. : Spectrum, 2009, Vol. 37.


4. **White, Ellen G.** Counsels to Writers and Editors. p. 35.


9 Responses to “Creeds and Fundamental Beliefs”

1. Bill Sorensen October 31, 2011 at 7:38 pm

She also said……

“Those who know the truth are to be worked by the Holy Spirit, and not themselves to try to work the Spirit. If the cords are drawn much tighter, if the rules are made much finer, if men continue to bind their fellow-laborers closer and closer to the commandments of men, many will be stirred by the Spirit of God to break every shackle, and assert their liberty in Christ Jesus. If men would act toward their fellow-men as to those whom Christ loves, if they would obey the commandment to “love thy neighbor as thyself,” there would be sweet harmony among the brethren. How much better it would be if those who claim to be Christians would behave like Christians. How much better it would be if all would cease speaking of their own good works and ways, indulging their self-esteem; refrain from the putting forth of the finger, imagining evil, and using their influence to weaken, oppress, and destroy. If men will not come to the terms made by the leading workers, they will not entertain them, they do not care what results may follow their injustice. With them it is rule or ruin. God has not appointed any man to do such work. And no human being shall be permitted to prescribe my liberty or intrench upon the perfect freedom of my brethren, without hearing my voice lifted in protest against it.” {RH, July 23, 1895 par. 2}

For every statement, there is a counter-statement.

The fact is, every individual will answer to God for himself.

None the less, if you disagree with the fundamental church teaching, go start your own church. No one is stopping you.

This is what the Protestant Reformation did.

We are all free to do the same.

Bill Sorensen

(Quote)
Hot debate. What do you think? 8 5

2. Jon S. Klingbeil  November 1, 2011 at 4:52 am

“People who think that the Scriptures should be the sole authority, should logically become Seventh Day Adventists and keep Saturday holy” (Saint Catherine Catholic Church Sentinel, Vol. 30, Nov. 22, May 31, 1995)

(Quote)

Well-liked: 14 0

3. Daniel Shannon  November 1, 2011 at 4:58 am

Some time ago in our Sabbath School class our head elder and head deconess got into a somewhat heated discussion. During this discussion I realized we had three visitors setting behind me. I became more and more nervous as the “discussion” continued. Later, to my dismay, those visitors told the person that invited them they would NOT be back. Their reason: “Hey, you people don’t know what you believe!” Paul is clear in 1 Corinthians 1:10 we should all speak the samethings, that there be no divisions and that we should be perfectly joined together. It is the devil’s goal to divide and conquer while Christ’s is to unite in Him. IF we are truly united together in Him we will be in harmony, we WILL be saying the samethings because it will be Christ speaking, not ourselves.

(Quote)

Hot debate. What do you think? 7 3

4. Sean Pitman  November 1, 2011 at 8:24 am

@Daniel Shannon:

IF we are truly united together in Him we will be in harmony, we WILL be saying the samethings because it will be Christ speaking, not ourselves.

There are many honest and sincere Christians who are not on the same page when it comes to various doctrines that the Adventist Church considers to be “fundamental”. This is due to the fact that different people are on different points in their understanding of the Scriptures and in their walk with God. God does not expect everyone to be on the same point in the path when it comes to knowledge or their relationship with God. So, there will be differences of opinion which are inevitable – even among the saints of God.

This is not to say, however, that all are therefore qualified to be an official representative of a particular organization, like the Adventist Church, simply because they might be in a saving relationship with God.

To be an effective representative of an organization requires training and education and general agreement when it comes to the primary goals and ideals of the organization itself. This also implies that just because there are those who may not qualify as effective representatives of a particular organization does not mean that they are therefore not in a saving relationship with God or that God is not leading them and inspiring them. It just means that they do not currently represent, in an effective
manner, the primary goals and ideals of the Adventist Church. That’s not necessarily a bad thing.

In short, this is not a moral issue. It is simply a practical matter of church order and government. That’s all. Church order and government, as with any viable organization, requires the enforcement of internal rules to which all who wish to belong must voluntarily submit or leave the organization. Otherwise, there would be chaos within and the organization itself would fragment and crumble into irrelevance.

Sean Pitman
http://www.DetectingDesign.com

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 5 3

5. Sean Pitman November 1, 2011 at 8:30 am

@Bill Sorensen:

For every statement, there is a counter-statement.

Your quote is out of context. Mrs. White is not arguing against rules of church order and government or against the internal enforcement of these rules – without moral judgements or implications.

Sean Pitman
http://www.DetectingDesign.com

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 6 2

6. Eddie November 1, 2011 at 10:35 am

Sean wrote: “For any organization to remain viable, internal order and discipline must be maintained.”

Precisely! And the most effective means is to use websites such as this to publicly identify and vilify heretics, including friendly and unfriendly agnostics.

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 1 5

7. Holly Pham November 1, 2011 at 11:40 am

I have attended several “new believers” Sabbath School classes where the Fundamental Beliefs (both 27 and 28) have been used as a text. This is a great way for members, both old and new, to become acquainted with what and why we SDA’s believe what we do, based on biblical evidence.

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 2 0
Sean Pitman November 1, 2011 at 11:44 am

@Eddie:

Sean wrote: “For any organization to remain viable, internal order and discipline must be maintained.”

Precisely! And the most effective means is to use websites such as this to publicly identify and vilify heretics, including friendly and unfriendly agnostics.

Evidently the church body has been unaware of the fact that certain suborganizations within the Adventist Church, La Sierra University in particular, have been actively attacking, in a very concerted and deliberate manner, certain key fundamental beliefs of the church on the church’s dime for several decades. The church, as a body, needs to become more aware of this situation and act accordingly if it is to maintain effective order and government as an organization.

Sean Pitman
http://www.DetectingDesign.com

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 6 0

Holly Pham November 1, 2011 at 3:01 pm

Jon S. Klingbeil: “People who think that the Scriptures should be the sole authority, should logically become Seventh Day Adventists and keep Saturday holy” (Saint Catherine Catholic Church Sentinel, Vol. 30, Nov. 22, May 31, 1995)

Great Quote. Has anyone ever tried to dispute this logic? From either within or outside our SDA Church/

(Quote)

Like or Dislike: 2 0
Poll

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