this sense, the article not only “feeds” the reader but teaches the reader to “fish for himself.”

The article offers good biblical evidence to support the understanding that the Sabbath will indeed play a pivotal role in the end-time crisis. In his closing few paragraphs, Dr. Paulien has done a good and important job of pointing beyond the seventh-day Sabbath issue per se to the real underlying issue. It is important that people understand that the issue is less about the day and more about what the day is: an outward symbol of humanity’s loyalty, allegiance, trust, obedience, and faithfulness to the God of creation who so loved humanity that He incarncated Himself and sacrificed Himself at Calvary.

Adrian Webster
Plumstead, South Africa

Finally, an academic article that the average Joe Soap can understand and still makes sense of it all.

Ian Kitney
Somerset, South Africa

On “Knowing Everything About Timbuktu” (PD 2008:1)

Adventists are not really against jewelry or adornment, only against certain forms of adornment. We are against the adornment around the neck, but if we move it six inches to the dress, it is now all right to wear. This is actually official church policy. The 1972 Annual Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church defines jewelry this way: “In the area of personal adornment necklaces, earrings, bracelets, rings (including engagement rings) should not be worn. Articles such as watches, brooches, cufflinks, tie clasps, etc., should be chosen in harmony with the Christian principles of simplicity, modesty, and economy.”

Where in the Bible (or in Ellen White, for that matter) does it say that necklaces are out but modest brooches are in? I actually do not have a problem with a church setting standards, but I do have a problem when the Bible is used to support those standards when it clearly does not.

For some Adventists, jewelry is exactly the list in the Annual Council action. But where in the Bible does it give such a list? We are very selective on which texts we say apply to us today. We say the passage from Genesis that Lichtenwalter quoted should be followed today but the passage in Leviticus forbidding the trimming of beards is totally ignored.

Can we agree to forget the whole subject of adornment since it seems clear we are never going to agree on this subject and the double standards drive many of our young people out of the church?

David Newman
Fulton, Maryland

A close look at 2 John outlines invaluable counsel for those who seek to impart truth to others.

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are concerned about the younger generation. Your concern runs deeper than terrorism, the economy, or the next presidential election. Your concern is for the hearts and minds of young men and women who are asking even more foundational questions.

Many are asking, “What is truth?” Many others are asking, “What is true to you?” Whether modern or postmodern (and most people are a mixture of the two), a vast number of people are in agreement in either their marginalization or complete rejection of God and His Word. They are basically self-focused, seeing truth and the decisions they face as relative. Right and wrong, good and bad, and righteousness and sin are outdated and irrelevant concepts to many.

Arthur Holmes wrote in 1977 that people no longer believe in absolute truth. He said that loss of

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focus on truth has led to a focus on hedonism; a loss of the universality of truth has led to relativism and a loss of the unity of truth has led to no moral truth. 2 Some Christians have looked at our younger generations and watched them walk away from church, often rejecting the God of the Bible and the Scriptures that claim to be truth. Others have chosen (from the best of motives, but to what end?) to alter not only the methods of delivering the truth of the Word of God, but even the truth itself, so as not to offend their listeners. Still other believers have refused to compromise the truth as found in Scripture but have limited that truth to lists of facts that can be memorized. Often this kind of truth-teaching leads to arrogance and legalism. Is this really teaching truth?

Is the controversy about truth new in this generation? People have always been concerned about truth, and there have always been questions about what is true. Before going to battle against Syria, Ahab sought the advice of his prophets as to whether he should go. “Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious,” they said, ‘for the Lord will give it into the king’s hand’” (1 Kings 22:12, NIV). Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was concerned that none of the Lord’s prophets was present and requested that Ahab inquire of a prophet of the Lord. Micaiah, the prophet, quickly (and apparently, sarcastically) prophesied victory for Ahab. Ahab responded by saying, “How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?” (vs. 16, NIV). Micaiah became serious and told a story of defeat for Israel and death for Ahab. Israel was defeated and Ahab died. The words of Micaiah were truth even though Ahab refused to believe them.

Almost 900 years later, Pontius Pilate, addressing Jesus Christ, asked, “What is truth?” (John 18:38, KJV). People today (almost 2,000 years later), including the youth, are also crying out for truth. They are searching for a worldview that provides answers to the most important questions of life. Even those who argue that there is no absolute truth, desperately hope that they are wrong.

It is the responsibility of an older generation to teach the next that which is true. What must we do today to teach future generations the absolute truth of the Word of God? Generations to come must be able to remain confident that absolute truth is provided in the Word of God. It is the responsibility of all believers, but especially those who are called and gifted to proclaim God’s Word to the next generation. What is it that we must teach them about truth?

Teaching Them to Know the Truth

Truth must first be known before anything further can occur. There is no substitute for teaching truth to the next generation. They cannot make a choice of whether to believe truth, whether to allow it to affect their lives, or whether they should impart it to others, unless they first know what it is. How many educators today are instructing the next generation while they themselves do not have a clear concept of truth? We must have a clear understanding of truth in order to be qualified to teach truth to our people in church and in the classroom.

What is truth? Arthur Holmes wrote, “All truth is God’s truth, no matter where it is found.” Unfortunately, not everyone believes this to be so. There are many different beliefs about truth.

Some would say that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Truth to them is relative to the person, place, time, or situation. Some would even say that truth is based on one’s feelings about an issue and that truth may change as often as one’s feelings change. Using the analogy of a building, Nancy Pearcey has explained that some have a divided concept of truth. In the lower story, we find science and reason, which are rational and verifiable, but in the upper story we have experience and private truth, which are non-rational and non-cognitive.4 Many go so far as to say that there really is no truth; there are only preferences. They may even claim to be Christians but also assert that each person comes to God in his or her own way.

Much of what is written about truth today attempts to explain the differences in biblical beliefs, modern beliefs, and postmodern beliefs about truth. Modernism and post-
much in common in relation to truth. They both proclaim rejection of God and glorification of focus on humankind. Instead of humans looking to the God of the universe to know truth, they look into their own sin-tainted intellect and determine their own truth. Relativism, secularism, naturalism, pragmatism, and hedonism are some of the fruits of a system of truth that is derived from sinful heart and minds. In contrast, the biblical teaching about truth is God-focused with humanity dependent on God and His Word.

Philosophers who hold to the authority of the Word of God believe in the correspondence theory of truth. James Emery White explained the correspondence theory as “that which corresponds with fact and is both objective and absolute.” Francis Schaeffer wrote, “When I say Christianity is true I mean it is true to total reality—the totality of what is, beginning with the central reality, the objective existence of the personal-infinite God. Christianity is not just a series of truths but Truth—Truth about all of reality.”

Our purpose at this point is to look into the Scriptures and see what God says about truth. Do the words of White and Schaeffer correspond with the biblical definition of truth and, specifically, with the teaching of 2 John?

An overview of Scripture points us to both Old and New Testament usages of the word translated “truth.” The Hebrew word ἕιμι is usually translated “truth” or “faithfulness.” It denotes certainty or reliability as it refers to God and His Word. Gottfried Quell wrote, “It is used absolutely to denote a reality which is to be regarded as . . . ‘firm,’ and therefore ‘solid,’ ‘valid,’ or ‘binding.’”

“The Hebrews recognized the logical truth that others also recognized, that a true word can be relied upon because it accords with reality, and that both for a God of truth and for a man of truth, word and deed are one.” Thus we may conclude that truth in the Old Testament was basically that which one can rely upon with confidence. In relation to God and His Word, this reliance is based in the God who is faithful in character, word, and deed.

The New Testament word for truth is αὐθεντεία, which is found 109 times in the New Testament, with 45 occurrences in the writings of John. Some have attempted to demonstrate a contrast between the Hebrew and Greek words, but there is not a significant difference. Of course, context must always determine the exact meaning of the word in all cases. John used this word in the sense of reality in contrast to falsehood or mere appearance.

John Murray expressed an even more complete explanation of John’s usage of the word truth. He said, “we should bear in mind that ‘the true’ in the usage of John is not so much the true in contrast with the false, or the real in contrast with the fictitious. It is the absolute as contrasted with the relative, the ultimate as contrasted with the derived, the eternal as contrasted with the temporal, the permanent as contrasted with the temporary, the complete in contrast with the partial, the substantial in contrast with the shadowy.”

We may conclude that when God is called the true God in John 17:3 and 1 John 5:20, He is real. He is absolute, eternal, complete, and unchanging. If God is true and the source of truth, then His Word is also true.

What is the foundation of all truth? There are two key verses in the writings of John that point the way to the foundation of all truth. In John 14:6, Jesus Christ told His disciples, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (NKJV). He claimed to be the truth, the living truth. As He spoke to His Father in John 17:17, He prayed, “‘Your Word is truth’” (NKJV). Those who sit in churches and in classrooms must be taught that truth is found in God and His Word and they can know this truth. Jesus Himself is real, and His Word is the expression of reality that comes from who He is.

Second John 1-4 uses the word αὐθεντεία five times. Twice love and truth are used together. A third usage of truth speaks of truth as residing in believers. A fourth time truth is used, it is clear that the believers can and should live according to the truth. The final usage of truth is in 2 John 1, in which the addressees of the letter are called “those who know
Jesus Christ taught much about Himself and the will of God for humankind. He taught that the greatest commandments are to love God and love others and that the whole law is encapsulated in those two commands (Matthew 22:34-40). He taught about His own deity and humanity. He taught about His coming death and resurrection.

the truth” (NIV). John believed that it was not only possible, but also essential and normal for those who are Christians to know the truth. But the truth must not only be known by the believer, it also must be internalized and lived out in the daily course of life.

What truth must we teach? John wrote about the “teaching of Christ” in 2 John 9 (NIV). What was this teaching that was of such great importance? If the genitive tou christou is subjective, then it is referring to the teaching of Christ (Christ’s own teaching). If the genitive is objective, then John is referring to the teaching of others about Christ. Either one of these is exegetically possible. There is a third possibility, which is the most likely in this context. The noun is both subjective and objective.

Dan Wallace wrote, “In most cases, the subjective produces the objective notion.” He continued: “If both ideas seem to fit a given passage, and do not contradict but rather complement one another, then there is a good possibility that the genitive in question is a plenary (or full) genitive.”

Second John 9 is a prime example of a plenary genitive. With this in mind, we see that there are two groups of people mentioned: those who remain in the teaching of Christ and those who do not.

Those who are true believers will remain in the teaching that Jesus Christ verbalized when He walked upon this Earth. Jesus Christ taught much about Himself and the will of God for humankind. He taught that the greatest commandments are to love God and love others and that the whole law is encapsulated in those two commands (Matthew 22:34-40). He taught about His own deity and humanity. He taught about His coming death and resurrection.

Jesus spent much of His time during His ministry going about the land teaching people. Whether it was one person such as the woman at the well in Samaria or thousands of people along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was constantly teaching. “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (Matt. 4:23, NIV). Matthew 5:2 introduces the famous Sermon on the Mount with these words: “He began to teach them saying…” (NIV). The sermon ended with these concluding remarks, “He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (7:29, NIV). Teaching the truth to the next generation means that we must be teaching those things that Jesus taught—and all that He taught.

The teaching of Christ also means the teaching of others about Christ. It was the teaching of Christ that produced the teaching about Christ. If what was taught by others was not in agreement with what Christ taught, then it was not true; it did not match up with reality. Men such as Paul, Peter, John, and James all taught others about Jesus Christ. It was important for the first-century believers to know what these men taught because it was true. It was also imperative that they reject the teachings of those who contradicted the teaching of Jesus Christ and the writers of the New Testament. They were not to welcome those teachers or to accept their teachings (2 John 10).

From a study of the word didachē (“teaching”) in the New Testament, it becomes even clearer that this word is often used to refer to the totality of the teaching of and about Jesus Christ. This would also lend support to the view that the genitive phrase “the teaching of Christ” is both subjective and objective. The teaching in 2 John may specifically point to the truth of the humanity of Christ, but it also must not be limited to one particular teaching about Christ as if other teachings are of little importance.

Rengstorff wrote concerning the use of didachē by the New Testament writers, “They do not mean a particular dogmatics or ethics, but His whole didaskein, His proclamation of the will of God as regards both form and content.”

None of the teachings of Christ or about Christ as recorded in Scripture may be ignored. If this teaching is the totality of the teaching of and about Christ, and it comes from God, who is true and whose every word is true, then the teaching is actually the truth that John has so strongly emphasized. Those who desire to teach truth must be sure that they adhere to the teaching of the Word of God. The whole counsel of God must be taught to the next generation, assuring that all of the teaching is from God and thus essential.

One more significant matter
must be addressed at this point as to what we must teach the next generation. It concerns the teachings and commandments that John addresses in his letter.

We live in a day in which many people do not want to think or learn. It seems that more and more ministries are lessening the teaching that goes forth, while increasing the opportunities for people to “have their needs met” apart from the truth of the Word. People want to be entertained so that they feel good. Chris -

John addressed this issue and said that there are commandments to live by. There are certain things required of true followers of Jesus Christ. It is impossible for them to live the life that He requires until they know what He has commanded. They will not know until someone teaches them those commandments as found in the Word of God.

John made it clear that it is essential to know the teaching and the commandments of Jesus Christ. Marshall wrote, “To know the truth means to know and accept the Christian message. Such knowing goes beyond merely knowing facts or doctrines to a positive acceptance of the truth and commitment to it.”

According to 2 John 9, those who do not remain in the teaching do not have God. In other words, they are not saved or born again. Those who know the truth in verse 1 are those who have come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. They are not those who merely have their heads full of facts. Acceptance of true Christianity necessitates acceptance of truth.

Any teaching that departs from what we know about Christ in the Word will lead to ruin for all involved. We must be most wary of any such teaching. Marshall put it this way when he wrote, “Any teaching which goes beyond the plain message of Scripture should at once put us on alert lest it actually contradicts the truth revealed in Scripture.”

We must be diligent students of the Word of God, teaching everyone the whole counsel of the Word of God. They must come to know the truth. We must teach them that the truth as found in the Word of God so that they clearly understand it, and as a result, it impacts them in life-changing ways. What does this mean for the teacher of the Word?

Teaching Them to Believe the Truth
The truth will never be more than mere academic knowledge until the hearer chooses to believe it. It will still be fully the truth, but knowledge alone is not the final intent of God for people. He intends that those who come to know the truth will then respond in faith to what they know.

The word for “faith” or “believe” is not found in 2 John, but the concept is. As noted above, knowing the truth in the writings of John includes accepting the message so that the person becomes committed to the truth. This is another way of saying that a person chooses to believe what he or she knows to be true. Those we teach expect reasonable explanations as to why they should believe what we teach them. If we teach them the truth of the Word of God, we should also provide sound reasons for believing what we are teaching them. Second John presents two sound reasons to believe the truth as presented by John and as found throughout the Word of God. The first reason to believe the
If we do not believe that God’s Word is true, then our students and church members will probably detect the hypocrisy that we exhibit. We must believe that the Bible is God’s Word and that it is absolutely true. We must believe that Jesus Christ the Son of God came to this Earth in flesh, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, and rose three days later, victorious over sin and death.

truth is that it is from God. This is implied throughout the text and throughout the writings of John. Second John 4 talks about receiving a commandment from the Father, and this commandment was to walk in truth. Verses eight through 10 speak of the doctrine of Christ and that this doctrine, or teaching, is essential for those who claim to have Jesus Christ came in the flesh are deceivers and antichrists; they are not believers in Jesus Christ (vs. 7). Those who are taught the truth, but choose not to believe are deceived and followers of those who are antichrists. If God is who He claims to be in the Bible and if the Bible is true as it claims, then those who come to know the truth must believe the truth because it is from God. They must commit themselves to the author of truth and that which He has inspired, that is, His Word.

The second reason to believe the truth is that it is absolute. All people believe in absolute truth. Even those who assert that there is no absolute truth are making statements of absolute truth. In 2 John 1, John wrote to “those who have known the truth” (NKJV). If there is no absolute truth, then no one can claim to know it. He goes on to affirm that the truth “abides in us and will be with us forever” (vs. 2, NKJV).

He could not make this claim if truth were that which changes over time or is different for different people in different places. The truth he believed in is a truth that abides with believers forever. If God is unchanging, then His Word is unchanging and that Word is true, thus truth is unchanging. If truth is unchanging, then we can teach it to the next generation as that which is worthy of their faith.

We teach others best by a combination of verbal instruction and lifestyle example. If we do not believe that God’s Word is true, then our students and church members will probably detect the hypocrisy that we exhibit. We must believe that the Bible is God’s Word and that it is absolutely true. We must believe that Jesus Christ the Son of God came to this Earth in flesh, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, and rose three days later, victorious over sin and death. We must continue to grow in our faith in the God who is true and the Word He has given us.

Teaching Them to Live the Truth
John taught that the truth must not only be known and believed, but it must also be lived. Truth that is not lived is really not truth that is believed. It is not truly known in any practical sense. John emphasized what it means to live the truth in his second letter. Teaching knowledge and faith in the truth should not be separated from practical living of the truth. There are three key ways that he directly addressed the issue of living the truth.

Walking in truth. The Greek word used for “walk” is περιπατεῖν. It occurs 95 times in the New Testament, about half of which are in the literal sense and half in the figurative sense. In the literal sense, it simply means to walk or walk around. In the figurative sense, it is used as a designation for conduct of life, or the way a person lives his or her life.

John uses this word to refer to the whole life of the believer. To walk in truth means to live in such a way that it corresponds to the truth that one claims to believe. Walking in the truth takes the teachings of Scripture and lives life in such a way that what is taught is what is lived. The worldview that is derived from Scripture dictates how life should be lived; it provides a moral framework to guide all of life. The moral decisions faced by followers of Christ must be coherent with the truth that is taught in the Word of God.

Gunther Ebel compared walking in the truth to walking in the light and contrasted them both with walking in darkness. Those who walk in the truth are living in such a way that they reflect Christ, who is light. They live lives of righteousness and holiness as prescribed in the Word of God. Their lives are not marked by darkness or sin.

Teachers of truth must teach all to live according to what the Word of God says. The chosen lifestyle of each person ought to correspond to the teaching of the Word. We must not be content merely with disseminating information, though more biblical content needs to be taught. We must teach doctrine and then demonstrate to our hearers the practical response necessary for those who walk in the truth. This means that teaching must be verbalized clearly with accurate applications.
made, but it must also be modeled by teachers of truth. They must live what they claim to know and believe. Teachers of the Word cannot teach what they do not live.

**Walking according to His commands.** Walking in truth and walking according to His commands are basically synonymous. The commands that come from the Father must be true because He is true and His words are true. His commands are all understood through His words to humanity. In them, He expresses His will for His people. Those who teach the Word to the next generation must make clear what God has commanded for His people. They must not fear offending their listeners by making absolute statements. Freedom in Christ has never meant that Christians are free to disobey the commands of God as found in His Word. We must teach the next generation to live lives that are consistent with what He requires.

**Walking in love.** John clearly connects truth, commands, and love. The commands are true because they come from God. The command that is emphasized in this passage is the command to love one another. It is not a new command; it is the command that goes back to the beginning. Whether this “beginning” goes back to Creation or to the beginning of the church age, it is clear that the command is to love. Jesus summarized the commandments in the Old Testament law when He told His listeners first to love God with all that they were and then to love others as they loved themselves.

Love was a prominent theme for John in his Gospel and his letters. He wrote, “This is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (1 John 3:11, NKJV). “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God” (4:7, NIV).

Love is the mark of a true believer, not just to love God, but even enemies. Love was a requirement, a commandment, laid down for God’s children: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34, NIV).

Again, he wrote, “this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us” (1 John 3:23, NIV). Love for one another means striving for the highest level of love. John recorded the words of Jesus who said, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12, NIV).

There are many other Scriptures that stress the imperative nature of love, but it is clear that those who walk in truth are those who obey the Lord’s commands. Those who are obedient to Him are those who are seriously committed to loving one another. Walking in truth and walking according to God’s commandments will always lead to walking in love.

As we teach young men and women the truth of the Word of God, we must teach them to love others as God loves them. When they become committed to loving others in such a way (which ought to be mark of every true Christian), they will fulfill the commands of God for His people. True biblical love will never violate a command of God. This love is evident in believers’ obedience to God from the heart alongside their loving behavior toward others. Second John 6 says, “This is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love” (NIV).

Those who are called to teach the Word of God to the next generation must clearly instruct their hearers concerning all that the Bible teaches about love. The younger generation needs to understand what God’s love is and how love is always obedient to God. But they must also experience the love of those who teach them. Concerning the duty of those who teach, Marshall wrote, “It is as a pastor or teacher who communicates the Word of God that he has authority to command his congregation, but this authority is complemented by the note of personal urgency which comes from his own love for those over whom he has been set.”

Church members and students will learn how to love one another as they are loved by their pastors and professors.

**Teaching Them to Remain Faithful to the Truth**

In a world in which many live for the next experience and believe that truth changes (that is, if there really...
Cults begin because someone has something new and exciting to teach, claiming it comes from God. Anything that does not correspond to the truth of the Word of God must be considered error. Teachers of the Word must not run ahead of the truth and must continually impress upon their hearers that there are false teachers, many of whom have brilliant minds, who have run ahead of the truth. Their words may sound convincing, but they do not speak truth.

is something called “truth”), it is no wonder that people move from church to church or from Christianity to other religions, or even completely away from all organized religion. They have been taught that commitments are not necessary unless they are of personal benefit.

Many come to the conclusion that life really has no meaning, but instead of committing suicide to end their meaningless existence, they instead choose a narcissistic and often hedonistic lifestyle, pretending that life has some purpose. We must humbly and prayerfully expend our energies to teach them to know, believe, and live the truth, but we must also teach them to remain faithful to the truth. The truth must not be cast off like worn shoes or outdated computers. This requires the development of a commitment that cannot be broken or revised.

Even Christian leaders are falling away from the truth. Some do so morally. Others choose to believe that the simplicity of the gospel and the Christian faith are too juvenile for their advanced minds. Still others fear offending people with claims of absolute truth, and as a result, ignore basic doctrines of the faith, including the exclusivity of salvation through Jesus Christ.

John clearly stated that the believer must remain faithful to the truth for a lifetime. There are two significant ways that this is advocated in 2 John.

Do not run ahead of the truth. Verse nine addresses those who go ahead or run ahead of the teaching of Christ. There were false teachers in the first century who brought teachings that denied the biblical teachings about Christ and what He commanded. Second John 7 and 8 calls those who did not confess that Jesus Christ had come in human flesh “deceivers.”

There were those who denied and taught others to deny the humanity of Christ. Denial of the humanity of Christ meant that He could not have died to pay the penalty for the sins of humankind. The false teachers who had visited the believers to whom John wrote were determined to destroy the foundations of their faith. Neither those teachers who denied the incarnation of Christ nor those who followed them had true salvation, according to verse nine. They did not have God.

To run ahead of the teaching (the truth) is a reference to the teaching of the heretics who were promoting their false teaching as that “which had enabled them to advance beyond the rudiments of the faith in which the common herd were content to ‘abide.’ John refers sarcastically to their claim. They had indeed ‘gone ahead.’ They had advanced so far that they had left God behind them! He who denies Christ thereby forfeits God.”

We must always seek to grow in our knowledge of truth, but any time the discovery of truth goes beyond the clear teaching of Scripture, the teacher must back up and recommit to the truth as found in the Word of God. Truth does not change. We cannot become so mature that we outgrow truth.

Cults begin because someone has something new and exciting to teach, claiming it comes from God. Anything that does not correspond to the truth of the Word of God must be considered error. Teachers of the Word must not run ahead of the truth and must continually impress upon their hearers that there are false teachers, many of whom have brilliant minds, who have run ahead of the truth. Their words may sound convincing, but they do not speak truth.

Remain in the truth. All must be so committed to the truth of the Word of God that they never depart from it and never cease teaching it to the next generation. In fact, they must develop followers of Christ who are in the race for life. John wrote in verse nine of those who do not remain in the teaching of Christ and those who do remain in the teaching of Christ.

The verb menō is found 118 times in the New Testament. Sixty-six of those usages are located in the writings of John, with 24 of them in his letters. This word means to remain, stay in a place or with someone, to continue to exist for a specific time, to live, or metaphorically to hold fast, to remain steadfast in a teaching, in fellowship with, in the married state, to stand firm, pass the test, or to live on.

In the writings of John, menō expresses the closest possible relationship between Father and Son and also between Christ and the believer.
Contextually in 2 John 9, this word is used twice with reference to the teaching of Christ. It means that the believer must continue to hold fast to the truth about Jesus Christ. It is “truth that is eternal, truth that is abiding and unchanging because its source is the one true God.”

Sinful people—all people—must not only come to know, believe, and live the truth of the gospel; they must also continue to know, believe, and live the truth. The younger generation needs more Christian leadership to model what it means to know, believe, and live the truth. They need to both hear and see those who not only start well and have seasons of powerful ministry; they need those who will teach them how to continue with Christ for a lifetime; they need to learn from those who finish well.

Those who are called, trained, and take seriously the responsibility of teaching the next generation of believers must not be ashamed of teaching that the Bible is the absolute truth of God. Refuse to compromise, explain away, or sit in judgment over the clear teaching of Scripture. Commit yourself to a continually growing understanding of the Word of God with the desire that your faith in the God who is true also continues to strengthen. Refuse to be content with mere intellectual knowledge of the things of Christ. Strive by the power of Christ to live out the truth so that the character of Christ in you will guide your words and actions as you love God and people day by day. Maintain your commitment to truth throughout the seasons of life, both doctrinally and morally.

As you remain committed to truth in your personal walk with Christ and your influence upon people, use your teaching to impact the younger generation so that they also have a passion to know the truth of the teachings of Christ as found in the Word of God. Challenge them to believe the truth so that they commit their lives to Christ in saving faith and lifelong discipleship. Train them up to live their lives for Christ, not according to the standards of the world or even according to the ideas of religious men, but according to the teachings and commands of God. Encourage them to live humbly for Christ, depending on His grace and power to live the truth all the days of their lives, one day standing before Christ having finished well.

All who are teachers of the Word of God must see the younger generation as a great gift from God and as those who will be used by God in these days to reach the world for Christ. If you are one of those who hold up God and His Word before young men and women today, do so with confidence that it is God’s truth and there are no substitutes for it.

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The nature of inspiration has provided an ongoing discussion among Adventist scholars since the very beginning of the church.

Seventh-day Adventists represent a modern eschatological movement born out of the study of the Holy Scriptures. Their specific mission is to proclaim the Word of God “to every nation and tribe and language and people” (Rev. 14:6, NRSV).

In many places around the world, Seventh-day Adventists have actually been known as the “people of the Book.” As a people, Adventists have always held—and presently hold—high respect for the authority of the Bible. At times in the denomination’s history, however, church leaders have held different views on the nature of the inspiration of Scripture.

The Adventist understanding of inspiration as it relates to both the Bible and the writings of Ellen White is important for two reasons: (1) Though their basic function differs, Adventists have generally assumed that both sets of writings were produced by the same modus operandi of inspiration; and (2) the views on each overlap in the development of an understanding of the Bible’s inspiration.

Terminology of biblical inspiration is often confusing. Such technical expressions as “mechanical inspiration,” “verbal inspiration,” “plenary inspiration,” and “thought inspiration” have carried different meanings. It is important to have a basic understanding of those terms.

“Mechanical inspiration” is usually associated with the theory that all the words of Scripture, even down to the Hebrew vowel points, were actually dictated by the Holy Spirit. This virtually negates the human element of Scripture.

“Verbal inspiration” normally is understood by its advocates to mean the Holy Spirit guided the writers not only in receiving a divine message but also in communicating it, without completely eliminating the personality and the style of the writers. The emphasis, however, is on the end-product of the whole inspiration process, namely, on the words of Scripture.

The term “plenary inspiration” denotes that Scripture in its entirety is inspired, making no distinction between alleged inspired and noninspired words. Some authors prefer this term to distinguish their position from any mechanical understanding of inspiration, which may at times be associated with verbal inspiration.

Last, “thought inspiration” is proposed to indicate that it is the writer who is inspired. The Holy Spirit transmits God’s thoughts to the writer, who then chooses the proper words to express those thoughts under the continued guidance of the Spirit.

Some authors use these terms without defining them, taking for granted that their meaning is common knowledge.

The Millerite Legacy

Seventh-day Adventists inherited their early views of Scripture from their former denominations and the Millerites. William Miller had accepted Deism as a young man. At that time he actually gave up his faith in the Scriptures. He questioned the Bible’s inspiration because of what he considered its discrepancies.

After 12 years in deistic circles, Miller experienced conversion, after which he began a two-year period of intensive study of Scripture. His basic assumption was that “if the Bible was the word of God, every thing contained therein might be understood, and all its parts be made to harmonize.” At the end of his intensive Bible study, Miller asserted that the inconsistencies that he had earlier seen in the Scriptures were gone.

In his 1822 statement of faith, Miller expressed his conviction that “the Bible is given by God to man” as “a revelation of God to man.” In 1836 he asserted that “there never was a book written that has a better connection and harmony than the Bible,” which has “a general connection through the whole.”
While dealing with some difficulties in the Bible, Miller even preferred to blame its translators rather than to admit obscurities and inconsistencies in the original text. In other words, he came to accept the full authority and inspiration of the Bible because he became convinced of the harmony and unity of its content. For him, inspiration affected the actual text of Scripture and not just the general ideas. When he finally concluded that Scripture was clear and consistent, he accepted its ultimate authority for the rest of his life.

Early Adventist Views (1844-1883)

Sabbatarian Adventists retained William Miller’s high view of Scripture. James White stated in 1847 that “the [B]ible is a perfect, and complete revelation” and “our only rule of faith and practice.” The third article of the 1872 statement of Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs composed by Uriah Smith asserted similarly that “the Holy Scriptures, of the Old and New Testaments, were given by inspiration of God, contain a full revelation of his will to man, and are the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”

Apart from such concise statements, Seventh-day Adventists dealt little with the nature of its inspiration up to the early 1880s. The major Seventh-day Adventist concern on the subject of the Bible during this early period was to defend its divine origin from deist attacks. Such defenses of the Bible provide, however, insightful evidences of early Adventist views on the infallibility of Scripture.

In 1863, Moses Hull, a Seventh-day Adventist minister, made the first significant Seventh-day Adventist response to infidel attacks on Scripture in his book, *The Bible From Heaven*. Hull advocated the authenticity, integrity, and credibility of the Bible, insisting that nothing in the Bible contradicts any of the sciences of “physiology, anatomy, hygiene, materia medica, chemistry, astronomy, or geology.”

In 1867, the *Review and Herald* published a series of 22 responses to what deists were asserting as “self contradictions” of the Bible. Those responses dealt, for example, with such issues as whether one woman or two went to Christ’s sepulcher (John 20:1; Matt. 28:1); whether Christ ascended from Mount Olivet or from Bethany (Acts 1:9, 12; Luke 24:50, 51); and whether 24,000 or 23,000 Israelites died by the plague in Shittim (Num. 25:9; 1 Cor. 10:8).


Sparse statements on inspiration can be found also in the articles and books penned during that period (1844-1883) about the prophetic gift of Ellen White. Those statements, however, were more concerned about proving the inspiration of her writings than in discussing the actual nature of inspiration.

Up to the early 1900s, no clear discussion of the doctrine of inspiration is found in Seventh-day Adventist literature. While responding to attacks against the trustworthiness of the Bible, Seventh-day Adventists demonstrated their commitment to a view of Scripture similar to Miller’s. Early Seventh-day Adventists were convinced that the process of inspiration preserved the actual text of the Scriptures from factual errors and contradictions.

Focus on the Nature of Inspiration (1883-1915)

Before 1883, Seventh-day Adventists had been mainly concerned with defending the divine inspiration of the Bible from outside infidel challenges. Some internal crises regarding the nature and authority of Ellen White’s writings, however, pushed Seventh-day Adventists in the 1800s into a more thoughtful discussion of the doctrine. During that period two major questions were raised: (1) Are there degrees of inspiration? (2) Did the Holy Spirit dictate the actual words of the inspired writings?

Are there degrees of inspiration? Administrative problems and conflicts of personality at Battle Creek College led Ellen White to send a few testimonies to Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald* and president of the college board, reproving him for some unwise decisions. Resentment against such reproofs was one factor that led Smith to the assumption that not all her writings were equally inspired. By the spring of 1883, Smith was convinced that while Mrs. White’s visions were truly inspired, her testimonies were not.

It seems that to harmonize such is-
Assuming that inspiration varies according to the various forms of revelation, Butler argued that the Scriptures “are inspired just in the degree that the person is inspired who writes them.” Since Scripture resulted from different forms of revelation, according to Butler, there likewise had to be distinct degrees of inspiration, of authority, and of imperfection. For him, the Scriptures “are authoritative in proportion to the degrees of inspiration.”

Although the theory of degrees of inspiration was advocated outside Adventist circles, this was the first time such a theory was advanced in an official Seventh-day Adventist publication. There are indications that it was so influential that some people were prompted to almost completely disregard Ellen White’s testimony at the 1888 General Conference session in Minneapolis.

The theory of degrees of inspiration continued into the late 1880s in some Seventh-day Adventist circles. In response to this, Ellen White penned a letter to R. A. Underwood, president of the Ohio Conference, disclosing that it was shown to her that “the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration published in the Review.” Since “to criticize the Word of God” is to “venture on sacred, holy ground,” no human being should ever “pronounce judgment” on God’s Word, “selecting some things as inspired and discrediting others as uninspired.” She explained also that “the testimonies have been treated in the same way; but God is not in this.”

In a similar manner, the senior Sabbath school lesson for January 7, 1893, also denied the possibility of “different degrees of inspiration,” for the reason that “such a view destroys the authority of God’s word and gives to each one a Bible made by himself.”

Did the Holy Spirit dictate the actual words? Another discussion that engaged Seventh-day Adventists between 1883 and 1915 concerned whether the Holy Spirit dictated the actual words of inspired writings.

A partial response to this issue came from the 1883 General Conference Session, which suggested a grammatical revision of Ellen White’s Testimonies for the Church. At that time, the General Conference appointed a committee of five individuals—W. C. White (chair), Uriah Smith, J. H. Waggoner, S. N. Haskell, and George I. Butler—to supervise that revision.

While opposing the theory of mechanical inspiration, the motion did not mention any factual error in the content of the Testimonies. Only grammatical “imperfections” should be corrected, without changing the thought “in any measure.” George W. Morse stated that “by the inspiration of the Scriptures is not meant the inspiration of the words and phrases, but the general purpose and use of the same.”

Uriah Smith, who had been a member of the committee for revising the Testimonies, proposed, however, a via-media solution to the tensions between the theories of mechanical inspiration and thought inspiration. He suggested that if the words were “spoken directly by the Lord,” then “the words are inspired.” If the words did not come directly from the Lord, then “the words may not be inspired,” but only “the ideas,
The process of inspiration had actually exercised a controlling influence on the whole writing of Scripture. In 1890, D. M. Canright, ex-Seventh-day Adventist minister and writer, began to attack the inspiration of Ellen White’s writings after he left the church in early 1887. Already in the 1888 edition of his book, Seventh-day Adventism Renounced, Canright stated that Ellen White was “not inspired” because, among other things, (1) she herself changed the wording of previous drafts of her own writings; (2) she incorporated suggestions from her husband and secretaries in the process of correcting the grammar and improving the style of her writings; and (3) she often copied “without credit or sign of quotation from other non-inspired authors.”

Meanwhile, several Seventh-day Adventist authors stressed that the process of inspiration had actually exercised a controlling influence on the whole writing of Scripture. In 1890, for instance, the Signs of the Times stated that “the New Testament does not speak of inspiration as being given to men, or of men being inspired. It was the writings which were inspired, or, literally, ‘God-breathed.’ The New Testament declares this repeatedly of the Old Testament. See 2 Timothy 3:15, 16; Acts 1:16; Hebrews 3:7; 1 Peter 1:11. Peter classes Paul’s writings with the Scriptures, and Paul declares that his words were given by the Spirit of God. 2 Peter 3:16; 1 Corinthians 2:13.”

While denying the “verbal inspiration of translations,” the Signs of the Times in 1909 emphasized the verbal inspiration of the words of Scripture in the original Hebrew, Chaldaic [Aramaic], and Greek languages. “These words,” it was stated, “were the words inspired by the Spirit of God.”

A more mechanical view of inspiration was stressed by Dr. David Paulson, founding president of Hinsdale Sanitarium, in a 1906 letter to Ellen White: “I was led to conclude and most firmly believe that every word that you ever spoke in public or private, that every letter you wrote under any and all circumstances, was as inspired as the Ten Commandments.”

That Ellen White did not endorse such a mechanical view of inspiration is evident from her response to Paulson, in which she clearly stated that neither she nor the other Seventh-day Adventist pioneers “ever made such claims.”

During this period, Ellen White penned some of her more significant statements on inspiration. For Ellen White, the inspiration of Scripture is a mystery that parallels the incarnation of Christ. She declared that as Christ was at the same time divine and human (John 1:14), so “the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine with the human.” So organically merged are the two elements throughout Scripture (cf. 2 Tim 3:16) that “the utterances of the man are the word of God.”

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Noteworthy is the fact that Ellen White made use of different versions of the Bible in her writings. The use of different versions was also supported by other contemporary Seventh-day Adventists. This is a significant point because later on the issue of the reliability of certain English translations of the Bible would be raised in Seventh-day Adventist circles.

against the Bible but as “the strongest evidences of its divine inspiration.” While “the way of salvation” is discernable even to “the humble and uncultured,” there are in Scripture mysteries that challenge “the most highly cultivated minds.” Speaking about such mysteries, she warned that “men of ability have devoted a lifetime of study and prayer to the searching of the Scriptures, and yet there are many portions of the Bible that have not been fully explored. Some passages of Scripture will never be perfectly comprehended until in the future life Christ shall explain them. There are mysteries to be unraveled, statements that human minds cannot harmonize. And the enemy will seek to arouse argument upon these points, which might better remain undiscussed.”

Though admitting that the human language of Scripture is “imperfect,” she still held that God’s Word “is infallible” and should be accepted “as it reads.” She stated, for instance, that in Scripture the history of Israel was traced by “the unerring pen of inspiration” “with exact fidelity.” She regarded the Bible as the “unerring standard” by which “men’s ideas of science” should be tested. Therefore, “the Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of his will.”

Noteworthy also is the fact that Ellen White made use of different versions of the Bible in her writings. The use of different versions was also supported by other contemporary Seventh-day Adventists. This is a significant point because later on the issue of the reliability of certain English translations of the Bible would be raised in Seventh-day Adventist circles.

That by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Seventh-day Adventists still regarded the Scriptures as the infallible and trustworthy Word of God is evident from their responses to higher criticism. For example, Charles M. Snow, editor of Liberty magazine and associate editor of the Review and Herald, stated in 1912 that the assumption that “the Word of God is “inspired, but not infallible”, is the reiteration on Earth of Satan’s challenge to God in heaven. When man sets himself up as a judge of the words and works of God, the rebellion in heaven is reproduced in the Earth.”

As previously seen, it was during the period 1883-1915 that Seventh-day Adventists began to face an internal crisis on the nature of inspiration. Significantly, it was during this period that Ellen White penned some of her most deliberate statements on the subject. These would be studied again and again by Seventh-day Adventists as they continued the study of the biblical teaching of inspiration after her passing on July 16, 1915.

The Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy (1915-1950)

Since its very inception, Seventh-day Adventism had developed under the stabilizing influence of Ellen White. From 1915 on, however, her influence was largely confined to the legacy of her writings. This transition contributed to the development of an identity crisis about the nature and authority of those writings that had been obviously nourished by the revision of the Testimonies in the mid-1880s and of The Great Controversy in the early 1910s. That crisis reached its climactic expression in the summer of 1919 in the context of the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy that challenged a large number of North American denominations. While Modernists, under the influence of Darwinian evolutionism, challenged the historicity of the biblical accounts of creation and of other supernatural divine interventions, Fundamentalists were defending the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture in response to those challenges.

Three significant events took place in mid-1919 in the development of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of inspiration. First, Francis M. Wilcox, editor of the Review, published in the June 19 issue of that periodical a large report on the “Christian Fundamentalists” Conference, which he had attended in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in late May. Second, a Bible conference for denominational editors, college teachers of Bible and history, and members of the General Conference was held in Washington, D.C., from July 1 to 21, 1919. Third, D. M. Canright’s Life of Mrs. E. G. White came off the press also in July 1919, as the author’s final criticism of Ellen White.

Of special significance were the sections of July 30 and August 1 of the Bible and History Teachers’ Council that followed immediately after the 1919 Bible Conference. Dealing respectively with “The Use
of the Spirit of Prophecy in Our Teaching of Bible and History” and “Inspiration of the Spirit of Prophecy as Related to the Inspiration of the Bible,” those sessions were generally question-answer discussions chaired by Arthur G. Daniells, president of the General Conference. The focal points of these discussions were the issues of “verbal inspiration” and “infallibility” of prophetic writings.

Regarding the subject of verbal inspiration of Ellen White’s testimonies, A. G. Daniells stated that neither Ellen White, nor James White, nor W. C. White, nor anyone of “the persons who helped to prepare those Testimonies” ever claimed it. 37

As far as infallibility is concerned, A. G. Daniells stated that it is not right to regard the Spirit of Prophecy as “the only safe interpreter of the Bible.” 38 He argued also that Ellen White “never claimed to be an authority on history” or “a dogmatic teacher on theology” 39 and that she never regarded her “historical quotations” as infallible. 40

That the church leadership at large did not follow Daniells’ views of inspiration is evident not only from the fact that the records of the 1919 Bible Conference and Bible and History Teachers’ Council were not brought to public attention during the years that followed that conference, but also from the fact that his views were not reflected in the content of the several books and pamphlets or the Sabbath school quarterly published during the 1920s and 1930s in defense of the Bible as the Word of God.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Seventh-day Adventists supported Fundamentalism in uplifting the trustworthiness of the Bible in the context of the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy. That Seventh-day Adventists had historically held to a view of Scripture that had much in common with Fundamentalism is evident from their former responses to “infidels” and to higher criticism. Thus, F. M. Wilcox asserted that “Seventh-day Adventists, with their historical belief in the Divine Word, should count themselves the chief of Fundamentalists today.” 41

On July 15, 1920, the Review and Herald published a report on the second Conference of Christian Fundamentals, held in Chicago, Illinois. Leon A. Smith, literary editor of the Press Bureau of the General Conference, reported that “the conference affirmed its belief in the verbal inspiration of the Old and New Testaments as first penned by the Bible writers.” For Smith, “all this was good.”

In 1926, Benjamin L. House, professor of Bible and Homiletics at Pacific Union College, devoted a special section of his Analytical Studies in Bible Doctrines for Seventh-day Adventist Colleges to the topic of “The Inspiration of the Bible.” One of the first paragraphs of that section was a quotation from the non-Adventist author William Evans, stating that since inspiration is “God speaking through men,” the Old Testament is “just as much the Word of God as though God spake every single word of it with His own lips.” 42

Later on in the book, House defined more clearly his own concept of inspiration. He distinguished inspiration from revelation by postulating that while revelation is the “act of God by which He directly communicates truth to man,” inspiration “refers to the divine superintendence which has been given in speaking or writing all of the records found in the Bible.” Therefore, “all ‘revelation’ is ‘inspired,’ but all that is ‘inspired’ did not come by ‘revelation’.” 43

Holding the view of “Verbal or Plenary Inspiration,” House rejected the theories (1) of partial inspiration, for implying that “the Bible contains much that is not inspired”; (2) of concept or thought inspiration, for leaving the Bible writers “absolutely to themselves in the choice of words they should use”; (3) of mechanical or dynamic inspiration, for not accounting for “the different style of the various writers” and for “the material secured from historical records”; (4) of natural inspiration, for denying “the supernatural and the mysterious in the Bible”; and (5) of illumination or universal Christian inspiration, for holding that “the Christians of every age have been inspired just the same as the Bible writers.” 44

According to House, the theory of “Verbal or Plenary Inspiration”
In 1935, Carlyle B. Haynes, then president of the Michigan Conference, came out with his 222-page God’s Book, expanding considerably his previous arguments on inspiration. In this new book, Haynes spoke of revelation as “the informing process” and inspiration as “the imparting process.” He argued that as the information recorded by inspired writers does not always come from supernatural revelation, so individuals who sometimes receive divine revelations do not necessarily become inspired prophets.

holds that “all Scripture is inspired, 2 Tim. 3:16, that the selection of the very words of Scripture in the original languages was overruled by the Holy Spirit in some [way] . . . , and that the writers did experience the guiding and controlling influence of the divine Spirit in the choice of material. He guided the writer even in the choice of what imperial decrees, genealogies, official letters, state papers, or historical matters he might find necessary for recording the divine message of salvation.”

Although Ellen White and other Seventh-day Adventist authors had endorsed the use of different English versions of the Bible, in 1930, Benjamin G. Wilkinson, dean of the School of Theology and professor of Biblical exegesis at Washington Missionary College, in Takoma Park, Maryland, published his Our Authorized Bible Vindicated, advocating the reliability of the King James Version and blaming other modern versions for being distorted by Modernist influence. Such assertions were responded to by a committee from the General Conference, to which Wilkinson, in turn, replied.

In June 1931, Ministry reprinted several paragraphs from the non-Adventist E. Kretzmann’s article “Modern Views About Inspiration.” This reprint stated, under the title “Valuable Quotations From Reliable Sources,” that “all the thoughts” and “all the words of Scriptures” were inspired by the Holy Spirit. “Not only is every word of doctrine true, but there is also no mistake in the historical data offered, nor in any other point of divine or human knowledge.” Since “the Holy Scripture consists of words,” “if we do not accept verbal inspiration, then it is senseless, nonsensical, to speak of an inspiration of the Bible.”

The contemporary emphasis on the trustworthiness of the Bible was also reflected in the wording of the 1931 “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.” Instead of speaking of the Holy Scriptures as “the only infallible rule of faith and practice,” as both the 1872 and 1889 statements of beliefs did, the 1931 statement came out referring to Scripture as “the only unerring rule of faith and practice.”

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Haynes stated that in Scripture “there is no mechanical dictation, but inspiration,” which “means more than an uninspired account of inspired thoughts.” For him, inspiration was plenary, by which he suggested that “God’s inspiration includes the form as well as the substance,” and that it “extends to the words as well as the thoughts.” Haynes justified his position saying that “we cannot know God’s thoughts unless we know His words.”

Haynes argued also that the Bible writers “required inspiration” to produce a record “infallibly preserved” from “all error and mistake.” He regarded the Bible as infallibly accurate and precise not only in its historical accounts but also in its predictions of the future. For him, science and the Bible were in agreement.

In 1944, a new edition of F. M. Wilcox’s Testimony of Jesus, with an additional chapter on “The Inspiration of the Bible Writers,” came off the press. It was in this chapter that probably for the first time Ellen White’s Manuscript 16, 1888 (“The Inspiration of the Word of God”) and Manuscript 24, 1886 (“Objections to the Bible”) appeared in print. The second of these manuscripts would be quoted frequently in later discussions of the Seventh-day Adventist teaching of biblical inspiration.

Also during the period 1915 to 1950, some of the most significant Seventh-day Adventist studies in geology, biblical archeology, and biblical chronology appeared in support of
Among those trends would be an increasing tendency to define inspiration from factual studies on the person and writings of Ellen White.

This article is the first of three parts.

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BY THOMAS A. DAVIS

WAS ELLEN WHITE CONFUSED ABOUT JUSTIFICATION?

How do we make sense of sometimes seemingly contradictory quotations cited from the Spirit of Prophecy?

Since the Reformation, the customary position of Protestantism has been that justification is by faith alone, plus nothing. Some might say they vary even from much that she herself has written on the subject. It has even been suggested that when she wrote them she was somewhat mixed up in her understanding of justification and sanctification and did not get her concepts straightened out until she hit on an insight, found in Messages to Young People, that she penned in 1895: “Righteousness within is testified to by righteousness without. . . . The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven.”

The implication is, then, that when she penned those words she had begun to think of imputation as exclusively legal, and impartation as referring to the changed life of the individual subsequent to justification. Some hold that she did not confuse the roles of justification and sanctification in her writings from that time on. But did she really confuse them before this?

Manifestly, Ellen White did refine and more plainly express her ideas as time went on, but she did not change them fundamentally in any way. Within the context of justification and sanctification in her writings from that time on, But did she really confuse them before this?

In his book, Messenger of the Lord, Herbert Douglass posits that as a first rule of interpretation, one must embrace the wider context and, “include all that the prophet has said on the subject under discussion before coming to a conclusion.” Agreeing with this rule, we must therefore include, in our understanding of Ellen White’s view of justification, the quotations under consideration.

This being so, it would seem she uses the term justification in two senses. The first usage may be understood in the generally accepted sense of the sinner being declared right, objectively regarded by God as being righteous through Christ’s righteousness credited to him.

“The grace of Christ is freely to justify the sinner without merit or claim on his part. Justification is a full, complete pardon of sin. The moment a sinner accepts Christ by faith, that moment he is pardoned. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is no more to doubt God’s forgiving grace.”

With this understanding virtually all Christians are in accord. It is in connection with Ellen White’s second usage of justification that problems arise, for here she uses it subjectively, in a way that is not merely attributive but is also experiential.

“If you pray in sincerity, surrendering yourself, soul, body, and spirit, unto God, you put on the whole armor of God, and open the soul to the righteousness of Christ; and this alone,—Christ’s imputed
righteousness,—makes you able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

This represents a number of similar statements that merit consideration.

As noted, much of Protestantism has insisted that justification is an outside-of-you legal arrangement that does nothing for one experientially. But there are some, a growing number, who believe that the nature of the Reformation controversy with Catholicism forced an emphasis that was actually an imbalance of the true meaning of that term. Furthermore, Luther himself did not insist on the exclusively legal aspects of justification, as some have held he did.

That biblical justification is legal, forensic, no Bible student will deny. In fact, it has to be. To quote Phillips’ paraphrase of Romans 3:20: “‘No man can justify himself before God’ by a perfect performance of the Law’s demands—indeed it is the straightforward of the Law that shows us how crooked we are.”

So there is no other way to be justified, except through Christ’s perfection accounted to us. We are justified freely by grace through the blood of Christ (Rom. 3:24; 5:9, 16). Whatever is ours by grace is always absolutely unearned and undeserved.

As observed earlier, some have suggested that Ellen White was somewhat mixed up in her understanding of justification and sanctification at the time she penned the quotations under discussion. If justification is always only judicial, and if the experiential is found only in sanctification, and if imputation always connotes only a legal declaration, that Ellen White continued to be confused for some time after she wrote the statement found in Messages to Young People. For example, she wrote, in 1896, the Savior “testifies that through His imputed righteousness the believing soul shall obey the commandments of God.” And in May of the same year she wrote, “Let perfect obedience be rendered to God through the imputed righteousness of Christ.” So she hadn’t “caught on” a year later, it appears.

But another problem arises with that argument. If Ellen White were herself unclear or naive in that area, the question arises that is often asked under similar conditions: Could she be mistaken in others? At this point all we do is testify to our belief in the inspiration and dependability of the Spirit of Prophecy as manifested in Ellen White’s writings.

In that same year, 1896, her important book Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing was published: “God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart.”

She here uses the term forgiveness, but this must subsume justification, because she wrote, “To be pardoned in the way that Christ pardons, is not only to be forgiven [justified], but to be renewed in the spirit of our mind.” This insight that pardon and justification are synonymous is not unique with Ellen White.

In fact, the notion that justification is always only a legal pronouncement is not in tune with some recent theological thought. The evangelical author John R. W. Stott insists that the teaching that we are justified in Christ, “makes it impossible for us to think of justification as a purely external transaction.” And the theologian Joachim Jeremias wrote, “God’s acquittal [justification] is not only forensic, it is not an ‘as if’... it is the beginning of a new life, a new existence, a new creation through the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Returning to Ellen White’s understanding of justification, she affirms that if we surrender our lives to Christ, taking Him as our Savior, no matter how sinful we may have been, His character is accepted in place of ours and God sees us as though we had committed no sin. This is forensic justification. But immediately she merges the subjective seamlessly with the forensic: “More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the constant surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure.”

It will generally be agreed that transformation, sanctification, begins simultaneously with justification. But that this transformation is connected with justification is the difficulty. For, as observed, by many it seems to be settled that the Bible

Much of Protestantism has insisted that justification is an outside-of-you legal arrangement that does nothing for one experientially. But there are some, a growing number, who believe that the nature of the Reformation controversy with Catholicism forced an emphasis that was actually an imbalance of the true meaning of that term. Furthermore, Luther himself did not insist on the exclusively legal aspects of justification, as some have held he did.
teaches that justification is only accounted to the person.

But is this so? Does the Bible clearly and consistently show that the terms translated by justification or related words are always forensic?

In important respects, the answer is theological, not linguistic. And often one’s theology depends on one’s educational bias, philosophy, preconceptions, and spiritual experience.

So if asked, “What does the Greek say?” linguistics does not always solve the problem. The answer frequently depends on the person interpreting the Greek. To no small degree the meaning one accepts often depends on one’s theological leanings. This is so in the case of the words associated with justification in the Bible.

The key term in resolving the difficulty with justification is dikaiosune. This word actually has a very wide range of meaning, which tells us its interpretation in a particular text often depends not only on linguistic and context, which do not always resolve the problem, but also, sometimes determinably, on theological bent.

The Greek lexicographers Thayer and Arndt-Gingrich and others inform us that in Paul’s writings dikaiosune refers to character. “In Paul,” says Thayer, it is the state acceptable to God which becomes a sinner’s possession through the faith by which he embraces the grace of God offered him in the expiatory death of Jesus Christ.”14 One of its meanings is described as “denoting the characteristics of the dikaios: righteousness, uprightness,” “the characteristics required of men by God.”15 The Presbyterian theologian A. A. Hodge observes, in connection with Romans 8:3 and 4, that dikaiosune, righteousness, “is the character of the dikaios [the righteous one], that in him which satisfies the law.”16 The context supports this.

He who becomes dikaios (righteous) by faith, the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament explains, receives by faith God’s dikaiosune (“the righteousness bestowed by God”))17 into his life as the “power and salvation of God.”18 Dikaiosune, then, refers to the righteous qualities the believer receives with justification.

A word in the two preceding quotations is the key to the resolution of the problem: power.

When the thrust of the more than two dozen Spirit of Prophecy quotations is examined, an interesting common concept emerges. In each of them the explicit or implicit idea is empowerment. “His imputed grace and power He gives to all who receive Him by faith.” “Without me, ye can do nothing; but in him, and through his righteousness imputed unto us, we may do all things.”

As in Creation, God “spoke, and it was” (Ps. 33:9, NKJV), so when God pronounces a person justified, it is not only declarative, but dynamic.

“The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is in the word of God. This word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature, and re-creates the soul in the image of God.”21

Ellen White does not place the concept of “empowering” exclusively with sanctification, for sanctification is possible only as a result of the empowering. She couples empowering with justification because the power accompanies justification. It coexists with it; it makes it the dynamic, “effective word.” As light emanates from the Sun, that power emanates from justification. Thus, when God declares a person right, it is not simply a legal pronouncement to be recorded in some celestial book that registers a change in status. The declaration, because the Word of God is powerful, produces a change in state. As a result of God’s empowering imputed righteousness, sanctification, as a process, begins immediately. It is initiated by justification. So Ellen White could write, “Justification means that the conscience, purged from dead works, is placed where it can receive the blessings of sanctification.”22

Ivan Blazén’s definitive study on “Salvation” in the Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, reads, “Justification is a far more powerful reality than a mere legal adjustment in the books of heaven. It is a de-throning of the illegitimate authority that prevents a sanctified life, and the establishment of that divine authority that enables it.”23

Thus, on the basis of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, whether in the immediate context Ellen White refers to imputed righteous-
Christian life acceptable to God is as impossible for Christians on their own as is erasing the records of their sins from the books of heaven. Both are possible only by the grace of God. It is indeed by faith alone through grace that God sees us, declares us, accepts us, as righteous. But the result of that declaration is not, cannot be, simply a legal position. Because God’s Word is always dynamic, justification carries with it a galvanic spiritual energy that transforms those justified by faith.

Justification is not only forensic, judicial, and legal, but also subjective and experiential. But this fact need not be seen as in some way diminishing the forensic aspect. The Bible makes it clear—and this is abundantly supported by Ellen White—that Christians rejoice not only in God’s forgiveness for past sins, but also in the promise of power to live His new life. Living the Christian life acceptable to God is as impossible for Christians on their own as is erasing the records of their sins from the books of heaven. Both are possible only by the grace of God.

“Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16, NKJV). “Pursue . . . holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14, KJV). These are not forensic statements. Whatever definition Christians may have of holiness, it must deal with life and living. It is experiential. And to be compatible with Scripture, it must surely include a rectitude of character beyond the scope of human beings on their own. In the words of Ellen White, “The holiness that God’s word declares [man] must have before he can be saved is the result of the working of divine grace as he bows in submission to the discipline and restraining influences of the Spirit of truth.”

“Holiness is the gift of God through Christ [just as acquittal is the gift of God through Christ] . . . [Those who are born again] become conformed to His likeness, changed by His Spirit from glory to glory. From cherishing supreme love for self, they come to cherish supreme love for God and for Christ.”

“Our own strength is weakness, but that which God gives is mighty and will make everyone who obtains it more than conqueror.”

And here is abundant cause for greater praise of our God. For not only does He forgive, justify, which from the human perspective, at least, might seem the simpler act, but He takes hostile, rebellious, selfish, willful, unlovely, often hateful human beings—“and such were some of you” (1 Cor. 6:11, KJV)—and, transforming them, polishes them to reflect His own likeness. So justification is a marvel. So, too, is sanctification.

This change in attitude and lifestyle is as fully the work of God as is forgiveness and acquittal. As one is dependent on Him for forgiveness, so the other is as fully dependent on Him for overcoming. As one is impossible without the immediate intervention of God, so is the other. All of grace. And both the forensic acquittal and the empowerment for overcoming, says Ellen White, come through justification.

It is necessary now to clarify the concept of the subjective elements of imputed righteousness, as referred to by Ellen White. Earlier this article highlighted the notion of a subjective aspect in justification, as though it were strictly Roman Catholic, with no Protestant support. But while both Ellen White and Roman Catholicism—as well as many Protestant theologians—maintain that justification has its experiential as well as legal aspects, this is far from implying that they and Catholics are saying the same thing. In fact, about the only similarity is that both teach that imputed righteousness is more than a legal transaction. So what is the difference between Ellen White’s view of justification and the Roman Catholic position? A few differences are pertinent.

• In Ellen White’s, Adventist, and most Protestant teaching, justification never means that it becomes inherent, in the sense that when received it is then intrinsic, infused, and so is the Christian’s own. Justification is a gift of grace, whether justification in the sense that Ellen White sometimes referred to it, which is subjective, or whether it is what is termed legal or objective. It is always, continuously, and completely only of God.

Justification through faith, in any context, can be the Christian’s only in the way that the light bulb can continue to be illuminated as long as the electrical flow continues. So Christians maintain their justification and continue in the sanctification process only as the Holy Spirit is continuously in their lives. It does not, in the words of the Council of Trent, “adhere to [the soul] as the soul’s own holiness.”
Ellen White explicitly denies that it does. She writes, “[I]n order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul.” It is ours only in the sense of “Christ within us, whether subjective or objective.”

- In Roman Catholicism, justification is by faith and a holy life through the sacrament, baptism—"Justification is conferred in baptism, the sacrament of faith." In Ellen White, justification “can come alone through faith in Christ.” She does not use the term, “faith alone.” This is understandable, and shows her theological precision, because those words are sometimes used without qualification, when, in actuality justification depends on repentance and confession (1 John 1:9), regeneration and renewal.

- In Catholicism, sanctification is part of justification. Ellen White defines them as complementary, but different and distinct in a statement quoted previously from Messages to Young People.

- In Catholicism, sanctification being part of justification, justification “means both the event by which the Christian life is initiated and the process by which the believer is regenerated.” And as a process it was described at the Council of Trent. But biblically (Rom. 5:1), and in the writing of Ellen White, justification is not a process but an immediate, punctiliar transaction. “The moment true faith in the merits of the costly atoning sacrifice is exercised, claiming Christ as a personal Saviour, that moment the sinner is justified before God because he is pardoned.”

In summary, there are two aspects to justification: the legal (by virtue of which we may be declared righteous) and the subjective. This is confirmed not only by Ellen White, but also by contemporary biblical scholarship. The subjective has perhaps been underemphasized in view of the strong Reformation emphasis on the legal. It is sometimes felt that to admit anything but the declarative in justification is to weaken it mortally.

But the subjective does not weaken the objective any more than the law weakens grace when rightly understood. The forensic “alien righteousness” aspect of Luther’s justification maintains its place, which is graciously, freely to credit Christ’s merits to the account of the penitent sinner. Here is the heart of justification. The simultaneous subjective aspect of justification, which the Bible and Ellen White affirm, is God’s response of power to the sinners’ call to enable them to strive toward holiness of life. And, again, the second as well as the first is beyond the range of the sinner himself or herself.

REFERENCES

2. Page 35.
5. Sons and Daughters of God, p. 346, italics supplied.
7. Ibid. (May 28, 1896).
8. Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 114, italics in original.
I n the last issue, my col-
umn focused on the
value and object—the
"what"—of Christian
meditation. Christians
meditate on various aspects
of the Word of God. In this article,
the focus will be on the “when” and
the “how.” Of all the basic questions
to consider on this subject, the
“when” and the “how” might be the
easiest to understand but perhaps
the hardest to practice.

When I was a young pastor, I once
asked Leslie Hardinge, the former
and highly esteemed theology pro-
fessor of a previous generation, how
he went about studying the Word of
God. I had considered his insights
into Scripture refreshing, his
thoughts profound and yet simple
about the character of God. His reply
stayed with me to this day; he simply
said: “Little and often.”

To cover less ground but do so
several times each day is better than
studying a huge amount occasion-
ally. Memorizing or focusing on a
verse or passage in the morning,
going about one’s business having
stored it in the heart, then
coming back to it for a few
minutes at noon, and yet
again before bed, forces the
mind to grapple with the in-
tent of God’s words.

This concept has a higher source:
“There is but little benefit derived
from a hasty reading of the Scrip-
tures. One may read the Bible
through and yet fail to see its beauty
or to comprehend its deep and hid-
den meaning. One passage studied
until its significance is clear to the
mind and its relation to the plan of
salvation is evident, is of more value
than the perusal of many chapters
with no definite purpose in view and
no positive instruction gained. Keep
your Bible with you. As you have op-
portunity, read it; fix the texts in
your memory. Even while you are
walking the streets you may read a
passage and meditate upon it, thus
fixing it in mind.”

No wonder Joshua was urged to
meditate on God’s word “day and
night” (Joshua 1:8, KJV), and the
first promise in Psalms is “Blessed is
the man . . . [whose] delight is in the
law of the Lord; and in his law doth
he meditate day and night” (Ps. 1:1,
2, KJV)! There is evidence that sug-
gests we keep thinking through the
night, while we sleep, what we pon-
dered during the day.

This may have become obvious
by now: the reason we meditate on
God’s Word is to appropriate God’s
character: “We all, with open face
beholding as in a glass the glory of
the Lord, are changed into the sam e
image from glory to glory, even as by
the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18,
KJV).

When Jesus encountered Saul on
the road to Damascus, His purpose
was to induce meditation upon His
wayward Israelite to help him recog-
nize that he was pursuing the wrong
foe. He blinded him for three days
and nights to give him a chance to
ponder what he was doing.

It turned out that Saul saw more
while in darkness than when, while
sighted, he was so busy persecuting
God’s people. Insights into the pur-
poses of God became so much
clearer to him than when he sought
advanced teaching from the apostles
in Jerusalem. They had nothing new
to offer him. He changed from Saul,
the Pharisee who read and studied
Scripture that resulted in religious
elitism, to Paul, the apostle who
pondered Scripture, leading him to
see Jesus’ humility as the ultimate
self-emptying experience.
Once I was meditating on the story of the feeding of the 5,000. At the end of the day, after thousands were fed, after Christ walked on water and enabled Peter to do the same, the disciples had still not grasped the power of the miracle of the loaves. Why? Had they been obedient to Him perhaps their hearts would not have become hardened in spite of witnessing such great miracles. But obedient to what? To Christ’s command: “You give them to eat” (vs. 37, NKJV).

Christ wished to empower John’s disciples as well as His own to act on God’s word alone. Had they not cast out demons and healed the sick just days before? If the disciples had acted on Jesus’ word, they would have saved Him great heartache and spared others the ensuing confusion. They would have seen that God was even able to provide for multitudes. At the end of the day, after thousands were fed, after Christ walked on the loaves. Why? Had they been obedient perhaps their hearts would not have become hardened in spite of witnessing such great miracles. Why? Had they been obedient perhaps their hearts would not have become hardened in spite of witnessing such great miracles.

There is always a risk in being open to meditation, even if well-intentioned and well-directed Christian meditation. Some writers and Christian thinkers today have toyed with mystical elements of meditation that subtly veer the sincere Christian from God’s path. But the mere risk should not discourage us from God’s desire to delve deeply into His very self.

Frank Laubach was considered “the apostle to the illiterate” in the 1930s and 1940s. Selfless, with a generous spirit, he spent many hours every week helping adults in Philadelphia to read. A Christian, he came to decide that his life with Christ could be so much more if he chose to set his mind on Christ. Disciplined, he made a conscious choice to think on Him every waking hour of the day. He kept a diary in the form of letters to his father. And he noticed a change in his life. “April 18, 1930. I have tasted a thrill in fellowship with God which has made anything discordant with God disgusting. May 24, 1930. This concentration upon God is strenuous but everything else has ceased to be so. I think more clearly, I forget less frequently. Things which I did with a strain before, I now do easily and with no effort whatever. I worry about nothing, I lose no sleep. . . . Nothing can go wrong excepting one thing. That is that God may slip from my mind. . . . June 1, 1930. The effort [of fixing my mind on Christ] does something to my mind which every mind needs to have done to it. . . . God does work a change. . . . Last Monday . . . I remember how as I looked at people with a love God gave, they looked back and acted as though they wanted to go with me. I felt then that for a day I saw a little of that marvelous pull that Jesus had as He walked along the road day after day ‘God-intoxicated’ and radiant with the endless communion of His soul with God. Thou art no longer a stranger, God! . . . Thou art all the way inside with me—here . . . I mean to struggle tonight and tomorrow as never before, not once to dismiss Thee. For when I lose Thee for an hour I lose. The thing Thou wouldst do can only be done when Thou hast full sway all the time.”

As we ponder what God said, the Holy Spirit engages our minds in a similar fashion as what He did with His prophets of old. We enter into His audience to hear a personal word from the King rather than an impersonal pronouncement by a monarch to whom we could hardly relate. We’re often surprised at His longing that we remain before Him to hold conversation with us, so great a group of sinners. He seeks communion. And as we part from His presence represented by that favorite chair in the den at 5:00 a.m., or by the tree in the forest near our home, we carry with us His words that, when replayed in our minds later in the day, will slowly and surely lead us to more than communion with the Almighty. It will bring union with God’s purposes, wishes, and hopes.

REFERENCES

1 In Heavenly Places, p. 138.
We do not exactly know who first coined the word for this new kind of reality but it all began some time in the early 1980s when the U.S. military and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration launched new systems for interactive computer-generated imagery. In 1989, the U.S. Department of Defense launched Simnet, an experimental network of microcomputer-based workstations that enabled military personnel to practice combat operations on interactive, real-time training systems, called “virtual reality.”

Today the term “virtual reality” is used to describe an artificial computer-based environment that simulates reality through the use of interactive devices. One can send and receive information, and one’s actions partially determine what happens in the simulated three-dimensional visual or sensory environment. The illusion of being present in this simulated setting is effected by motion sensors that pick up the user’s movements and adjust the view on the screens accordingly. This computer-generated “reality” appears so real that it can hardly be distinguished from the real world. Software developers have quickly recognized the potential of such a virtual reality not just for the military and scientific community but also for the entertainment industry and those who are interested in exciting computer games.

In computer games such as “Sims” or in online games like “Second Life,” the players are able to choose a character they want to be and begin to build their own virtual identity. All can be the person they want to be. Players are able to immerse themselves in a fantasy world that resembles the real world out there—only better, it seems. Being the master of their fantasies, they can interact with other manmade characters and live their lives in such a way as they would not be able to do in real life. And, even better, they can restart the virtual existence of par-
ticular characters in virtual reality at their own choosing or drop out at any time.

However, one predicament with such a digital environment is that in virtual reality the tangible dimension of space and things is significantly reduced if not eliminated. Spatial reality cannot be measured and experienced the same way as in real life. And time is not experienced the same either. In the digital world, there is something like an “eternal now”—everything is geared to happen instantly. Hence virtual life is faster than real life. Because space and time are virtual realities, the experiential understanding of these essential dimensions of human existence does not have the same quality as in real life.

Given the lure of such entertainment, one wonders, Is there also something we could call “virtual faith”? Is it possible to replicate real faith, through which we are able to move mountains or heal the sick. Virtual faith could lead us to be in a position to receive the answers to all our prayers. Virtual faith could enable us to fast-forward in life and evade those disturbing situations when life gets tough. And after some unsuccessful attempts, virtual faith would, at the end, perhaps still get us to a “virtual heaven.”

Virtual faith, if there is in fact anything like it, will never be as satisfying as real faith because it is missing some of the most important and essential dimensions of human existence. Real faith has to do with a personal and very real being: God Himself. Real faith is about a real relationship in a real world. It is about a relationship that has a unique and unrepeatable past and has a matchless hope in a future that is grounded in God’s reliable word. Real faith is more than playing and re-enacting a fictive existence.

The beauty of real faith is that it is not artificial. It is real. It is so real that we develop real faith in real situations, in time and space. Here we make unique decisions that actually form and build our character. Virtual realities cannot substitute for real communication and real life. Faith, as the Bible describes it, is a living relationship with a personal Savior and living God.

The faith of the biblical writers was not based on some fictive myth. The apostle Peter writes: “We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16, KJV). Biblical faith is based on the sure Word of God and the life experience of the real person Jesus Christ: “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:3, 4, KJV).

Even though we are not in a position actually to see and touch Jesus today, it is comforting to know that we can nevertheless really love Him and believe in Him, as the apostle Peter writes: “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8, NIV).

The beauty of real faith is that it brings us in contact with new and live realities that we have not come up with ourselves and perceived before. Hence, real faith offers us surprising peace in the midst of many open questions. Through it we gain a true understanding of sin when we have cheated ourselves and others. Real faith opens our eyes to amazing forgiveness and undeserved love, when we cannot forgive and love others and ourselves. If we believe in God and are honest, He will surprise us in many very tangible ways, as only our Creator is able to do—only better than anything we could come up with in creating our own virtual reality.

Real faith grows in real life. The beauty of real faith is that it trusts a real Helper who is at our side, Jesus Christ, our High Priest, who has promised to sustain us when really need it. Rather than living in a virtual world, where one is easily isolated from real life, Jesus helps us to live victoriously in the real world. Praise God.

“Faith is a living, bold trust in God’s grace, so certain of God’s favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it.”

— Martin Luther
science has verified the artist’s observations. In doing so, Lehrer demonstrates one of the significant limitations of science. “It is ironic,” he says, “but true: the one reality science cannot reduce is the only reality we will ever know.”

What he is saying, of course, pertains to the abstract and sometimes ineffable qualities of life that cannot be quantified. They cannot be measured. They cannot be duplicated in the science lab.

And here is where religion and art have something elemental in common: each constitutes a search for truth utilizing tools that materialist science rejects. And when the two are utilized together—as God intended them to be—they convey profound truths that science simply does not care to investigate.

Consider, for example, the tabernacle that God commanded the Israelites to build during their 40-year detour in the wilderness. He was seeking to provide a way in which His people—an obstinate, “show-
me” bunch with no patience for abstraction—could come to understand the nature of His love for them and respond in kind. What do you do when you’re trying to convey spiritual concepts like justice and sacrifice to an estimated rabble of more than two million souls who are seemingly fixated on a literal golden calf and the “flesh-pots of Egypt”?

In today’s parlance, God could have used “shock and awe.” But He knew that you don’t truly win hearts and minds in this way.

He could have also deployed His priests in a comprehensive and systematic program of religious instruction. But this was not a topic of definitions and diagrams, of facts and formulas. It was far more than $A + B = C$.

With all the possible approaches at His disposal, God chose to represent His love to His people through the utilization of the arts. “The making of the Tabernacle,” observes Francis Schaeffer, “involved almost every form of representational art known to humanity.”

The most immediate and obvious of these would have been the visual arts. Browsing through Exodus 25–28, the reader glimpses the exquisite workmanship that went into the appointments of the sanctuary. Basic raw materials included gold, silver, and brass. From these were fashioned cherubim, flowers, loops, clasps, sockets, and rings. There were 11 curtains of goatskins, ram skins, and badger skins and a veil of blue, purple, and scarlet thread. And all this was supported by a structure of acacia wood.

And God knew exactly who He wanted to oversee the creation of all this beauty: Bezaleel, of the tribe of Judah; and Aholiah, of the tribe of Dan. He said he had filled these artisans with “wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship” (Ex. 31:3-5, NKJV). These capabilities were a divine gift. These artisans were ordained for their holy work.

Taking about half a year to build, in its completeness, the tabernacle was, in a real sense, a three-dimen-

sional stage in the round. It was “the example and shadow of heavenly things” (Heb. 8:5, KJV). Every physical property on this stage of about a thousand square feet had a meaning beyond itself. The laver, the table of showbread, the candlesticks, the altar of incense, the ark of the covenant—each fulfilled a specific function in the service, but it also represented something that transcended mere gold and acacia wood.

And the tabernacle also involved performance, theme, and story. In a sense, the sanctuary service was theater. The daily service was Act 1; the yearly service, Act 2. What the priests did—every movement, every act—each demonstrated a profound truth. Each of the details that God prescribed in the constructing of the tabernacle and the conducting of its services had meaning beyond itself.

“In the ministration of the tabernacle, and of the temple that afterward took its place, the people were taught each day the great truths relative to Christ’s death and ministration, and once each year their minds were carried forward to the closing events of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the final purification of the universe from sin and sinners.”

Interestingly, Ellen White describes in aesthetic terms the role of God’s church throughout history. Especially in the darkest of times, she says, it has been “the theater of His grace.”

“Good writing,” says author John Ciardi, “is as positive a search for truth as is any part of science, and it deals with kinds of truth that must forever be beyond science.” The same assertion could be made for any of the arts, and especially of those that are searching for spiritual truth.

It could be observed, of course, that this was written by an artist—not a scientist. What other viewpoint could you expect from a writer, after all? But in the search for truth, as Jonah Lehrer clearly asks, where should we be looking for “the only reality we will ever know”?

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2. Ibid., p. xii.