The Emerging Church

Protestantism has evolved through the centuries and is still undergoing further change.
Fernando Canale

Interpreting Scripture According to Scripture

Careful students of the Bible must base their reading on some key principles.
Richard M. Davidson

Identity, Exclusivity, and Inclusivity

Tolerance of others pertains to one of the many paradoxes of Christianity.
Stephen Bauer

Sabbath and Sanctification

For the Israelites, the Sabbath signified initial and ongoing sanctification through divine intervention.
The history of genetic mutations from which American Evangelicalism springs is complex. It could be said that the Protestant experiment began in Europe with the masterminds of the Reformation: Luther, Calvin, and the Radical Reformers, such as Karlstadt, Müntzer, Grebel, Manta, Hubmaier, Hut, Sattler, and Simons. Luther generated a revolutionary idea; Calvin developed the idea into a system; and the Radical Reformers anticipated the complexity and fragmentation of Protestantism and the roles that Scripture and laity would play in the evolution of the movement.

Eventually, state churches emerged from the reform movement in the 1560s and 1570s. Confessionalization is the interlocking of “religious beliefs and practices with the objectives of the state.”¹ In the process of organization, Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinistic) communities “defined themselves by explicit and extensive doctrinal formulations.”² Thus, doctrinal and organizational lines were drawn.

In England, Anglicanism in the 1520s and 1530s, and Puritanism in 1558 advanced different visions of the Protestant Reformation. Anglicanism, while remaining closer to tradition, attempted to purify the organizational and moral excesses of Roman Catholicism, drawing from both Luther’s and Calvin’s ideas. Following Scripture more closely, Puritanism attempted a more deep and extensive reformation of Christianity following the Calvinistic model from Geneva.

After the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), an exhausted Europe needed a break from religious debate and reformation. As a secular culture of tolerant rationalism emerged with modernity, religious commitment and church attendance greatly diminished. In this new cultural climate, Protestant renewal and adaptation brought about Pietism in 1675. Nikolaus Ludwig Graf Zinzendorf’s pietistic ideas influenced John Wesley’s emphasis on the role of experience in the Christian life.

**American Protestantism**

All these ideas and religious practices crossed the Atlantic and populated the fertile soil of early American settlement, creating, in turn, new developments centering on epoch-changing events, such as the first (1720-1750) and second (1800-1850) Great Awakenings. With the passing of time, the complexity and options of religious practices increased. Centrifugal forces overpowered centripetal ones. To overcome the disadvantages of theological and ecclesiological fragmentation, American Protestant denominations began to cooperate on specific projects, such as missionary outreach and the translation of Scriptures. American Evangelicalism is a coalition of Protestant denominations that
attempt to overcome their fragmentation by working together on theological and practical tasks.

As part of Protestantism, American Evangelicalism is a varied, multifaceted, and complex phenomenon that defies neat descriptions and definitions. Moreover, the term Evangelicalism may describe historical, doctrinal, and pastoral referents. Historically, it may refer to the sector of American Protestantism influenced by the two Great Awakenings and the Baptist and Methodist denominations strengthened by them. Doctrinally, it may refer to a theological summary of beliefs shared by various denominations. Pastorally, it may refer to a coalition of denominations working for a common cause. In this article, Evangelicalism is intended to describe the center of American Protestantism during the 20th and 21st centuries.

Modern Protestant Theology

After the Thirty Years’ War, emerging philosophical trends began to recast the intellectual landscape of European civilization. Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Descartes (1596-1650), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), and John Locke (1632-1704), among others, spearheaded a relentless attack on the foundations of classical philosophy and science, opening the way for the emergence of the Modern Age. In various ways, the new age would shake Christianity. One of these ways was the rise of the historical-critical method, based on the claim that Scripture is not an inspired book. This was advanced by philosophers like Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and John Locke.³

More than a century later, Protestant theologian Friedrich Daniel Ernest Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the father of modern Protestant theology, thought that the solution to the epistemological problem presented by modernity was to accept its premises and readjust theological construction to the new situation. Drawing from his Pietistic tradition, Schleiermacher argued that God reveals Himself through feeling rather than reason. On this basis, Schleiermacher went on to articulate a system of the Christian faith that became a solid alternative to the reigning Calvinistic system. Although both systems were Christian, they advanced widely different interpretations of doctrines, life, and ecclesiastical practices. Soon modern scientific ideas went on to challenge biblical cosmology by means of the evolutionary theory.

Fundamentalism

Not surprisingly, leaders of American Protestantism reacted differently to the new scientific ideas and the modernistic approach to theology championed by Schleiermacher. Since the new ideas appealed to intellectuals, they reacted to them first. For various reasons, some found the changes in the foundations of Christianity advanced by modernity convincing; others did not. Progressively, some theology professors and seminaries adjusted to the new ideas; others became critical of them.

During the 19th century, theologians from the Old Princeton Theological Seminary understood that the acceptance of modern epistemology and cosmology was incompatible with traditional biblical Protestantism. Acceptance of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, Schleiermacher’s theological system, and evolutionary theory represented a challenge to the foundations of biblical
Protestantism. As the heir to prestigious Old Princeton theologians Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) and Charles Hodge (1797-1878), Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823-1886), and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921) used their Calvinistic heritage to defend and reaffirm the classical understanding of Reformed Protestantism against the challenges of modern science and theology. Kevin J. Vanhoozer reminds us that “Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield laid the groundwork for conservative evangelical theology.”

At the turn of the 20th century, two very different events were brewing in American Protestantism. On the intellectual front, German biblical criticism, inspired by modern philosophical ideas, was eroding the authority of Scripture at the seminaries. On the practical life experience front, Pentecostalism came into existence. The former led to the rise of the Fundamentalist movement that defended the authority of the historical meaning of Scripture. The latter led to the rise of the Charismatic movement that produced a revival in church attendance across denominational lines.

In time, modern ideas and the modern reinterpretations of Christian theology reached popular culture and challenged ministerial practice. This gave rise to what we know now as “Fundamentalism.”

As with the words Protestantism and Evangelicalism, Fundamentalism also has a broad range of meanings and different referents. For instance, it can refer to any anti-intellectual, absolutist, and authoritarian position of any kind. It can also refer to religion in general, and to a particular period in the history of American Evangelicalism. In this article, the word Fundamentalism refers to the mutation of American Protestantism that evolved during the first half of the 20th century.

Some trace the origins of the “fundamentalist” version of American Evangelicalism to the “Niagara Creed” in 1878. A common enemy, modern culture and modern theologies, united a diverse theological spectrum that included millenarians and advocates of Old Princeton theology. Among the 14 affirmations included in the Niagara Creed, five became influential talking points against modernity: biblical inerrancy, the deity and virgin birth of Christ, Christ’s substitutionary atonement, His bodily resurrection, and the Second Coming. This action revealed a common modus operandi. Instead of arguing against modernity or showing the shortcomings of modern theology from solid biblical thinking, fundamentalists contended that the Bible, Christian doctrine, and Christian experience did not need to be redefined in light of the scientific, philosophical, and literary assumptions of modern culture. Ironically, according to some, Fundamentalism eventually led to a new version of American Evangelicalism.

Two events became emblematic of the fundamentalist movement, the publication of The Fundamentals between 1910 and 1915, and the “Scopes Monkey Trial” in 1925. The former, a theological initiative, “defended conservative evangelical Christianity,” and the latter, a cultural event, produced anti-Darwinian legislation in Tennessee. Because of the theological controversy, several Protestant denominations split up into fundamentalist and modernist wings. Because the media in the Scopes Monkey Trial “labeled theological conservatives as reactionary and anti-intellectual,” evangelicals sought to distance themselves from the “Fundamentalism” label.
In short, Fundamentalism came into existence as a response to the challenges modernity leveled against Christianity in general and conservative Protestantism in particular. There was no new light from Scripture, spiritual revival, or systematical understanding behind it. By its origin and nature, Fundamentalism was an apologetical movement.

**Neo-evangelicalism**

Several factors led to dissatisfaction with evangelical Fundamentalism, among them for instance, the fact that much of it was “ populist, ignorant, and hostile to intellectual theology,” and brought in isolationism and withdrawal from the mainstream culture of America. By the mid-1940s, "a number of influential thinkers emerged within fundamentalist ranks that sought a corrective to what they perceived as an increasing social and intellectual narrowness in the movement." Out of this restlessness emerged the neo-evangelical movement under the initial leadership of E. J. Carnell, Harold Ockenga, and Carl F. H. Henry.

These men sought to reform Fundamentalism in the areas of scholarship, apologetics, and its social dimension. Yet, the new evangelicals continued to fight against the neo-orthodox view of Scripture and the modernist theological system of Schleiermacher. Neo-evangelicals also distanced themselves from Fundamentalism by their social outreach and ecumenical engagement. While Fuller Theological Seminary embraced the reform and became the leading institution of neo-evangelicalism, *Christianity Today* came to be its unofficial voice.

The neo-evangelical movement’s deep historical roots go back to the middle of the 19th century. On the heels of the second Great Awakening in America, when Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were debating their ideas and Charles Darwin was developing his evolutionary theory, Protestant evangelicals in Europe felt a growing desire to demonstrate spiritual unity. In 1846, this sentiment led 800 leaders from 52 Christian bodies in eight nations to convene in London and organize the World Evangelical Alliance. The aim of this organization with a strong pietistic orientation was primarily ecumenical, based on a non-authoritative and incomplete statement of beliefs.

More than a century later at the Woudschoten Convention in Holland, an international group of evangelical leaders organized the World Evangelical Fellowship (1951) as an intra-evangelical ecumenical alternative to the World Council of Churches (1948). John Stott, renowned Anglican minister, helped in redacting the clearly ecumenical aims of the World Evangelical Fellowship: the furtherance, defense, and confirmation of the gospel; and fellowship in the gospel. Its doctrinal basis followed the same lines earlier adopted by the World Evangelical Alliance. Not surprisingly, there was little difference between neo-evangelicals and fundamentalists in the area of theology. Theological debate on traditionally unresolved issues continued.

However, the conviction that Protestants should relate to scientific teachings challenging evangelical doctrines and practices not by ignoring them but by engaging them intellectually was growing among evangelical intellectuals. Eventually, it became the watershed distinguishing
neo-evangelicals from fundamentalists. Progressively embracing their evangelical doctrinal, theological, and ecumenical traditions, neo-evangelicals engaged modernity in areas such as social responsibility, ecclesiology, science, Scripture, and theology.

In society, neo-evangelicals engaged culture by pursuing the social application of the gospel. In ecclesiology, they faced modernity from within their seminaries, churches, and mission organizations. In science, they moved from recent creationism to embrace the deep time of evolutionary history. In Scripture, they moved from full to limited inerrancy and use of the historical critical method. Arguably, with the passing of time, more evangelicals sided with Bernard Ramm’s (1916-1992) than with Carl Henry’s (1913-2003) vision of Evangelicalism. These were the hot issues at the time.

Not all neo-evangelicals, however, were happy with these new trends. In theological circles, controversy over biblical inerrancy arose and continues in the 21st century. This controversy takes place within evangelical institutions and seminaries. Norman Geisler, for instance, thinks that the new evangelical accommodation to the historical critical method’s demands is a “deviation from the longstanding evangelical teaching on Scripture.”

In the midst of theological controversy, Protestant historical orthodoxy continued unchanged. Overall, in the practice of ministry there was little change. Early enthusiasm stirred by Billy Graham’s evangelistic campaigns in the 1950s and 1960s diminished with the passing of time and the secularization of American society. Fundamentalism survived in the ethos of evangelical ministry, with some describing this phenomenon as “neo-fundamentalism.” Thus, while evangelical theologians faced challenges springing from modern science, evangelical ministers faced challenges springing from modern culture. Apparently, evangelical theology and ministerial practice faced the same enemy, modernity, without much interdisciplinary cooperation.

By the middle of the 20th century, deep philosophical and cultural changes emerged in Western culture triggered by World War I and World War II. Just as the Thirty Years’ War in Europe had diminished the authority of Christian faith as a trusted guide for civilization and ushered in the modern age of reason, the two world wars produced a loss of trust in reason and human institutions, paving the way for the postmodern age of individual and communitarian freedom. Existentialism in Europe in the 1940s and 1950s, and, the hippie movement in America in the 1960s and 1970s emphasized individual freedom and became forerunners of postmodernity. Evangelical ministers now faced the impact of modern secular culture with its materialism, individualism, and subjectivism in their own churches. As always, the new ideas reached the younger generations first and transformed them more quickly.

By the same time, Protestantism was experiencing epochal changes as well. After the second world war, Pentecostalism had “overtaken most of the mainline denominations that dominated the American religious landscape from 1800-1950.” The charismatic renewal of Evangelicalism “has led to new informal worship styles, an explosion in ‘worship songs,’ a new concern for the dynamics of worship, and an increasing dislike of the traditionalism of formal liturgical worship.” Yet the distinctiveness of the charismatic renewal pertained not to the styles, but to the nature of worship
that calls for them. Worship, according to Charismatism, is the "immediate encounter with God through the Holy Spirit and the ensuing transformation of the individuals."\textsuperscript{14}

External miraculous manifestations in worship proved an irresistible attraction for many, including the unlearned, materialistic, secularized, and rationalistically minded. Direct access to God, unmediated by priest, pastor, church, doctrine, or creed, was available just by attending church. This phenomenon implied the need for a lot of rethinking in Christian theology and practices.

In time, neo-evangelical pastors discovered that while biblical preaching and orthodox doctrine did not increase church attendance, charismatic worship did. This discovery paved the way for a pragmatic use of worship styles to reach secular-minded people, which was spearheaded by Bill Hybels of Willow Creek.

As the end of the 20th century drew near, in the midst of these vertiginous changes culture was eclipsing Scripture in Evangelicalism; the changes were almost unnoticed, yet not quite. In 1984, Francis Schaeffer mused, "There is a growing acceptance of the neo-orthodox existential methodology. There is a growing infiltration of humanistic ideas into both theology and practice. There is a growing acceptance of pluralism and accommodation. . . . Here again we see the great evangelical disaster."\textsuperscript{15}

While Schaeffer decried the surrender of evangelical leaders in their battle against modernity, modernity was evolving into Postmodernism, perhaps the greatest philosophical and cultural mutation since Plato. In 1988, Roman Catholic Theologian Hans Küng announced to fellow theologians that the advent of a new age in Western civilization was underway. "After the paradigm changes of the Reformation in the sixteenth century and of modernity in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, we experience, as I believe, at the end of the twentieth century, a new paradigm change to a 'New Age' that we tentatively call 'postmodern.'"\textsuperscript{16} Everything was about to change.

**Conclusions**

From the brief and partial description of some points in the long, complex, and variegated history of Protestantism, the following points may help to better understand present developments early in the 21st century.

- Protestantism emerged from Scripture as a reform of the Roman Catholic Church and a serious challenge to culture. For a variety of reasons, the reformation of the Roman Catholic Church evolved from outside its walls.
- The Reformation achieved during the 16th century was incomplete and continued during the 17th century, notably with Puritan theologians.
- The Reformation was fragmentary because of its incapability to develop a coherent theological system based on the *sola scriptura* principle.
- Luther and Calvin developed a system of Protestant theology using Roman Catholic philosophical foundations. This system provides the center for evangelical unity in denominational diversity even in postmodern times.
Arguably, the development of the Protestant Reformation slowed down when modern philosophy and science challenged the former’s biblical foundation.

The fact that Protestantism faced the challenges of modernity by way of apologetics slowed down its development and distracted it from its evangelical mission. Moreover, apologetics did not solve the intellectual problems that still confronted successive generations of evangelical intellectuals.

In the absence of intellectual answers to modern scientific and philosophical challenges to Scripture, Bible believing neo-evangelical leaders have progressively accommodated Bible interpretations and teachings to the dictates of science and popular culture in the areas of theology, doctrine, ministry, and worship. In short, neo-evangelicals faced secularization by adopting a modernistic neo-orthodox view of Scripture and secularizing worship music and liturgy.

Springing from the Protestant heritage, the charismatic renewal competes with Scripture and seems to divert Protestantism away from Scripture.

Postmodern culture and philosophy add new challenges to Protestantism.

After two centuries of gradual emergence from Scripture, Protestantism confronted challenges from science and culture during the last three centuries. Seemingly, the focus of the Protestant Reformation is switching progressively from Scripture to culture. Is the Protestant Reformation emerging from Scripture coming to an end?

Part 2 of “The Emerging Church” will appear in a future issue of Perspective Digest.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Ibid., p. 103.


6. See ibid.

7. Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke ,and Grant Lovejoy, Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to


13. Ibid., p. 420.


*Back to top*
How should we approach Scripture? It appears evident that without specific divine revelation on the subject of hermeneutics, we will never be able to find our way through the maze of human theories. On the other hand, if we accept the full authority of Scripture with regard to other biblical doctrines, should we not also expect to find in Scripture the divine perspective on how to interpret Scripture?

Seventh-day Adventists believe that just as we go to Scripture to find the doctrines of God, humanity, sin, eschatology, etc., so it is appropriate—essential—that we should go to Scripture itself to discover the doctrine of Scripture, and in particular, to learn the scriptural teaching on hermeneutics as a basis for constructing a theology that is faithful to Scripture.

Of course, we come to Scripture acknowledging our own biases, our own pre-understandings, but we come willingly, and claiming the divine promise that the Spirit will bring our presuppositions ever more in harmony with the biblical presuppositions (e.g., John 16:13; 14:16, 17, 26).

PRESUPPOSITIONS (FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES) FOR BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

A. The Bible and the Bible Only (Sola Scriptura)

A first presupposition set forth by Scripture concerning itself is that the Bible alone is the final norm of truth and absolute source of authority, the ultimate court of appeal, in all areas of doctrine and practice. The classic text that expresses this basic premise is Isaiah 8:20: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn” (NIV). The two Hebrew words for law and testimony point to the two loci of authority in Isaiah’s day that now constitute Holy Scripture: the Pentateuch (the Torah or Law of Moses) and the testimony of the prophets to the previously revealed will of God in the Torah. Jesus summarized the two divisions of Old Testament Scripture similarly when He referred to the “Law or the Prophets” (Matt. 5:17). The New Testament adds the authoritative revelation given by Jesus and His apostolic witnesses (Eph. 2:20).

Isaiah warned apostate Israel against turning from the authority of the Law and the Prophets to seek counsel from spiritist mediums (Isa. 8:19). In the New Testament era other sources of authority were threatening to usurp the final authority of the biblical revelation. One of these was tradition. But Jesus and Paul clearly indicate that Scripture is the final arbiter over tradition, including the tradition
of the religious authorities (Matt. 15:3, 6). This does not deny the usefulness of Judeo-Christian tradition, as some wrongly interpret sola scriptura, but rather upholds the supreme authority of Scripture over all tradition as the final norm of truth. Tradition, even ecclesiastical tradition, must be judged by Scripture.

Paul also emphatically rejects another source of authority, that of human philosophy, as the final norm of truth for the Christian (Col. 2:8). Even the philosophical presuppositions of fundamental theology must be judged by the standard of sola scriptura. Seventh-day Adventists believe that much of Christian fundamental thinking (“the principles behind the principles”) since shortly after New Testament times has been dominated by dualistic (Platonic-Aristotelian) philosophical foundations that present a timeless and spaceless concept of God. Thus the passages in Scripture that speak of God dwelling in a spatio-temporal reality must be deconstructed and reinterpreted in allegorical, figurative, or metaphorical terms. Adventists see the biblical teaching about God as including a call to Christians for a radical return to the biblical realism of sola scriptura that views the being of God as compatible with space and time.

Paul likewise rejects human “knowledge” (“science,” KJV) as the final authority (1 Tim. 6:20). Both Old Testament and New Testament writers point out that since the fall in Eden, nature has become depraved (Gen. 3:17, 18; Rom. 8:20, 21) and no longer perfectly reflects truth. Nature, rightly understood, is in harmony with God’s written revelation in Scripture; but as a limited and broken source of knowledge about God and reality, it must be held subservient to, and interpreted by, the final authority of Scripture (Rom. 1:20–23; 2:14–16).

Humankind’s mental and emotional faculties have also become depraved since the Fall; but even before the Fall, neither human reason nor experience could safely be trusted apart from or superior to God’s Word. This was the very point upon which Eve fell—trusting her own reason and emotions over the Word of God. The wisest man in history (who ultimately failed to heed his own warning) perceptively observed: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12, NKJV).

The principle of sola scriptura goes beyond the concept of prima scriptura. The Bible is not only the primary authority, it is the sole final and ultimate authority, the final arbiter of truth. Roman Catholics can affirm the primacy of Scripture, but as Frank Hasel observed, “in Roman Catholic dogma it is the church, and the church only, with its tradition, that claims the right to interpret Scripture authentically and authoritatively. . . . Thus Scripture, even though it is the primary source for theology, is domesticated by the hermeneutical spectacles of the church and its tradition.”

The principle of sola scriptura implies the corollary of the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible stands alone as the unerring guide to truth; it is sufficient to make one wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). It is the standard by which all doctrine and experience must be tested (2 Tim. 3:16–17; Ps. 119:105). Scripture thus provides the framework, the divine perspective, the foundational principles, for every branch of knowledge and experience. All additional knowledge and experience, or revelation, must build upon and remain faithful to, the all-sufficient foundation of Scripture.
The sufficiency of Scripture is not just in the sense of material sufficiency, i.e., that Scripture contains all the truths necessary for salvation. Adventists also believe in the formal sufficiency of Scripture, that the Bible alone is sufficient in clarity so that no external source is required to interpret it rightly. Adventists maintain the rallying cry of the Reformation—sola scriptura, the Bible and the Bible only—as the final norm for truth. All other sources of knowledge and experience must be tested by this unerring standard. The appropriate human response must be one of total surrender to the ultimate authority of the Word of God (Isa. 66:2).

B. The Totality of Scripture (Tota Scriptura)

A second general principle of biblical interpretation is the totality of Scripture (tota scriptura). It is not enough to affirm the sola scriptura principle. Those like Martin Luther, who called for sola scriptura, but failed to accept fully the Scriptures in their totality, have ended up with a "canon within the canon." For Luther this meant depreciating the book of James (as an "epistle of straw") and despising other portions of Scripture (as presenting the way of law and not the gospel).

The self-testimony of Scripture is clear in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (NKJV).

All Scripture—not just part of Scripture—is inspired by God. This certainly includes the whole Old Testament, the canonical Scriptures of the apostolic church (Luke 24:17, 32, 44, 45). But for Paul, it also included New Testament sacred writings as well. Paul’s use of the word scripture in his first epistle to Timothy (5:18) points in this direction. He introduced two quotations with the words “Scripture says,” one from Deuteronomy 25:4 in the Old Testament, and one from the words of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:7. The word scripture thus is used simultaneously and synonymously to refer to both the Old Testament and the Gospel accounts in the technical sense of inspired, sacred, authoritative writings.

Numerous passages in the Gospels assert their truthfulness and authority on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures (e.g., John 1:1–3 paralleling Genesis 1:1). Peter’s use of the term scriptures for Paul’s writings supports this conclusion: “Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:15, 16, NKJV). By comparing Paul’s letters to the “other Scriptures” (ESV, italics supplied), Peter implies that Paul’s correspondence is part of Scripture.

The New Testament is the apostolic witness to Jesus and to His fulfillment of the Old Testament types and prophecies. Jesus promised the 12 apostles to send the Holy Spirit to bring to their remembrance the things He had said (John 14:26). Paul states that “the mystery of Christ" was
"revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (Eph. 3:4, 5, NKJV). The apostles held a unique, unrepeatable position in history as bearing witness of direct contact with the humanity of Christ (Luke 1:2). This certainly validates the apostolic writings by the apostles like Peter, John, and Matthew. Paul also was called to be an apostle (Rom. 1:1), and he indicates that his writings are given under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and have full apostolic authority (1 Cor. 7:40). Thus, the New Testament embodies the witness of the apostles, either directly, or indirectly through their close associates Mark, Luke, James, and Jude (Luke 1:1–3; Acts 12:12, 25).

The principle of tota scriptura involves several related issues/corollaries.

1. Tota Scriptura and the Canon. What is the full extent of the biblical canon, and what forces/sources “authorized” the various biblical writings to be canonical? Adventists join other Protestants in affirming that the canonization of both Old Testament and New Testament is not a product of human agencies but of the Holy Spirit, and that the canonical books contain internal self-authenticating and self-validating qualities that were recognized as such by the community of faith.

Regarding the Old Testament, Adventists, along with other Protestants, accept only the 39 books of the Hebrew Bible, and not the so-called deuterocanonical books of the Apocrypha. The latter books, while containing some helpful historical information, were not written by inspired prophets, but came after the close of the Old Testament prophetic period (ca. 400 B.C.). Adventists accept a sixth-century date for the writing of Daniel (in harmony with the internal claims of the book), and place the canonization of the Old Testament in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (ca. 400 B.C.), both of whom as prophets played a role in popularizing and affirming the canonized books among the Jewish people (Ezra 7:10; Neh. 8:2–8). Jesus Himself recognized the three-part Hebrew canon (Luke 24:44), which was later reaffirmed at the Council of Jamnia (ca. 90 A.D.).

Regarding the New Testament, we have already noted above the apostolic witness inherent in all of these writings—all written by an inspired apostle or an apostle’s direct disciple who was an inspired eyewitness—and thus the canon of the New Testament was closed by the end of the first century when the last inspired apostolic document had been written. Such inspired apostolicity/canonicity was eventually recognized by the New Testament covenant community. The church “came to recognize, accept, and confirm the self-authenticating quality of certain documents that imposed themselves as such upon the Church.” 2 In sum, the church did not determine the Canon, but discovered it, did not regulate the canon, but recognized it; the church is not the mother of the canon, but the child of the Canon, not its magistrate, but its minister, not its judge, but its witness, not its master, but its servant. 3

2. Inseparable Union of the Divine and Human. All Scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament, is of divine origin. It is “inspired by God” (NASB), literally “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV). The picture here is that of the divine “wind” or Spirit coming upon the prophet, so that Scripture is a product of the divine creative breath. Thus it is fully authoritative: profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.
A corollary of the *tota scriptura* principle is that all Scripture is an indivisible, indistinguishable union of the divine and the human. A key biblical passage clarifies the divine nature of Scripture in relation to the human dimensions of the biblical writers: “We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-21, NIV).

Several related points are developed in this passage. Verse 19 underscores the trustworthiness of Scripture: it is “the word of the prophets made more certain.” Verse 20 explains why this so: because the prophecy is not a matter of the prophet’s own interpretation. The context here primarily suggests the prophets giving the message, without injecting their own ideas into the message, although the implication may be heeded by the non-inspired interpreter of Scripture.

Verse 21 elaborates on this point: Prophecy does not come by the initiative, the impulse, or the will of the human agent; the prophets are not communicating on their own. Rather, the Bible writers were prophets who spoke as they were moved, carried along, even driven by the Holy Spirit.

This passage makes clear that the Scriptures did not come directly from heaven, but rather God utilized human instrumentalities. An inductive look at the biblical writings confirms that the Holy Spirit did not abridge the freedom of the biblical writers, did not suppress their unique personalities, did not destroy their individuality. Their writings sometimes involved human research (Luke 1:1-3); they sometimes gave their own experiences (Moses in Deuteronomy, Luke in Acts, the psalmists); they present differences in style (contrast Isaiah and Ezekiel, John and Paul); they offer different perspectives on the same truth or event (e.g., the four Gospels). Yet, through all of this thought-inspiration, the Holy Spirit is carrying along the biblical writers, guiding their minds in selecting what to speak and write, so that what they present is not merely their own interpretation, but the utterly reliable word of God, the prophetic word made more certain. The Holy Spirit imbued human instruments with divine truth in thoughts and so assisted them in writing that they faithfully committed words the things divinely revealed to them (1 Cor. 2:10–13).

This corollary of the *tota scriptura* principle, that the human and divine elements in Scripture are inextricably bound together, is reinforced by comparing the written and incarnate Word of God. Since both Jesus and Scripture are called the “Word of God” (Rev. 19:13), it is appropriate to compare their divine-human natures. Just as Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, was fully God and fully human (John 1:1-3, 14), so the written Word is an inseparable union of the human and the divine. Just as Jesus’ humanity was sinless, so the Holy Scriptures, though coming through human instrumentalities, is fully trustworthy.

3. **The Bible Is Equivalent to—Not Just Contains—the Word of God.** Another corollary of the totality of Scripture principle is that the Bible is equivalent to, and not just contains, the word of God. The testimony of Scripture is overwhelming. In the Old Testament there are about 1,600 occurrences
of four Hebrew words (in four different phrases with slight variations) that explicitly indicate that God has spoken: (1) “the ‘utterance’ of Yahweh,” some 361 times; (2) “Thus ‘says’ the Lord,” some 423 times; (3) “God ‘spoke,’” some 422 times, and (4) the “‘word’ of the Lord,” some 394 times. Numerous times are recorded the equivalency between the prophet’s message and the divine message: the prophet speaks for God (Ex. 7:1, 2), God puts His words in the prophet’s mouth (Deut. 18:18), the hand of the Lord is strong upon the prophet (Isa. 8:11), or the word of the Lord comes to him (Hosea 1:1). Jeremiah 25 rebukes his audience for not listening to the prophets (vs. 4), which is equated with not listening to the Lord (vs. 7), and further equated with “His words” (vs. 8).

Summarizing the prophetic messages sent to Israel, 2 Kings 21:10 records, “The Lord spoke by His servants the prophets” (NKJV), and 2 Chronicles 36:15, 16 adds: “The Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, . . . but they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets” (NKJV). The prophetic message was God’s message. For this reason, the prophets often naturally switched from third-person reference to God (“He”), to the first person direct divine address (“I”), without any “thus saith the Lord” (Isa. 3:4; Jer. 5:7; Hosea 6:4; Zech. 9:7). The Old Testament prophets were sure that their message was the message of God!

Numerous times in the New Testament “it is written” is equivalent to “God says.” For example, in Hebrews 1:5-13, seven Old Testament citations are said to be spoken by God, but the Old Testament passages cited do not always specifically ascribe the statement directly to God. Again Romans 9:17 and Galatians 3:8 (citing Exodus 9:16 and Genesis 22:18 respectively) reveal a strict identification between Scripture and the Word of God: the New Testament passages introduce the citations with “Scripture says,” while the Old Testament passages have God as the speaker. The Old Testament Scriptures as a whole are viewed as the “oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2, NKJV).

Though the Bible was not verbally dictated by God so as to bypass the individuality of the human author, and thus the specific words were the ones chosen by the human writer, yet the human and divine elements are so inseparable, the human messengers so divinely guided in their selection of apt words to express the divine thoughts, that the words of the prophet are called the Word of God. The individual words of Scripture are regarded as trustworthy, accurately representing the divine message.

This is illustrated by a number of New Testament references. Jesus says, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, “‘Man does not live on bread alone but on every word [the Greek word for “word”; Hebrew for “everything”] that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matt. 4:4, NIV). Paul says of his own inspired message: “We impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual” (1 Cor. 2:13, ESV). Again Paul writes: “We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess. 2:13, ESV).

What is stated explicitly in the New Testament is also indicated by the instances when Jesus and the apostles base an entire theological argument upon a crucial word or even grammatical form in
the Old Testament. So in John 10:35 Jesus appealed to Psalm 82:6 and the specific word "gods" to substantiate His divinity. Accompanying His usage was the telling remark: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (NKJV). That is, it cannot be "loosed," "repealed," "annulled," or "abolished."

In Matthew 22:41-46, Jesus grounded His final, unanswerable argument to the Pharisees upon the reliability of the single word "Lord" in Psalm 110:1. In Galatians 3:16, the Apostle Paul likewise based his Messianic argument upon the singular number of the word "seed" in Genesis 22:17, 18. As we shall see below, Paul is recognizing the larger Messianic context of this passage, as it moves from a collective plural seed to a singular Seed. Jesus shows His ultimate respect for the full authority of the Old Testament Torah when He affirmed its totality: "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18, NKJV).

C. The Analogy (or Harmony) of Scripture (Analogia Scripturae)

A third general foundational principle of biblical interpretation may be termed "the analogy (or harmony) of Scripture" (analogia scripturae).

Since all Scripture is inspired by the same Spirit, and all of it is the Word of God, therefore there is a fundamental unity and harmony among its various parts. The various parts of Old Testament Scripture were considered by the New Testament writers as harmonious and of equal divine authority. New Testament writers sometimes supported their point by citing several Old Testament sources as of equal and harmonious weight. For example, Romans 3:10–18 includes scriptural citations from Ecclesiastes (7:20), Psalms (14:2, 3; 5:10; 140:4; 10:7; 36:2), and Isaiah (59:7, 8). Scripture is regarded as an inseparable, coherent whole. Major Old Testament themes are assumed by the New Testament writers and further developed.

The two Testaments have a reciprocal relationship in which they mutually illuminate each other. Jesus described how the Old Testament illuminates the New Testament (and Himself in particular) in John 5:39: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (ESV, italics supplied). Elsewhere Jesus describes how He is the Illuminator, even the fulfillment, of the Old Testament: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17, NKJV).

Neither Testament is superseded by the other, although the later revelation is tested by the former, as illustrated by the example of the Bereans, who "were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11, ESV, italics supplied). Even Jesus insisted that the conviction of His disciples not be based primarily upon sensory phenomena alone, but that they believe in Him because of the testimony of Old Testament Scripture (Luke 24:25-27).

The "analogy of Scripture" principle has three main aspects: (a) Scripture is its own interpreter (scriptura sui ipsius interpres); (b) Scripture is consistent; and (c) Scripture is clear.

1. "Scripture Is Its Own Interpreter" (Scriptura sui ipsius interpres). Martin Luther described it
this way: “Scripture is its own light.” Because there is an underlying unity among the various parts of Scripture, one portion of Scripture interprets another, becoming the key for understanding related passages.

Jesus demonstrated this principle on the way to Emmaus when “Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27, NKJV). Later that night in the upper room, He pointed out “‘that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:44, 45, ESV).

Paul expressed this same principle in 1 Corinthians 2:13: “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (NKJV). This text has been translated in different ways, but certainly the apostle’s own use of Scripture indicates his adoption of the principle. We have already noted the Old Testament quotations cited in Romans 3:10–18. The same phenomenon may be observed in Hebrews 1:5–13; 2:6–8, 12, 13.

In practical application of this principle that the Bible is its own expositor, Jesus, on the way to Emmaus, showed how all that Scripture says about a given topic (in His case, the Messiah) should be brought to bear upon the interpretation of the subject (Luke 24:27, 44, 45). This does not mean the indiscriminate stringing together of passages in “proof-text” fashion without regard for the context of each text. But since the Scriptures ultimately have a single divine Author, it is crucial to gather all that is written on a particular topic to be able to consider all the contours of the topic.

2. The Consistency of Scripture. Jesus succinctly stated this aspect of the analogy of Scripture: “‘The Scripture cannot be broken’” (John 10:35, NKJV). Since Scripture has a single divine Author, the various parts of Scripture are consistent with one another. Thus Scripture cannot be set against Scripture. All the doctrines of the Bible will cohere, and interpretations of individual passages will harmonize with the totality of what Scripture teaches on a given subject. We have already seen how the New Testament writers linked together several Old Testament citations from different Old Testament genres as having equal and harmonious bearing upon the topic they were explaining.

While the different Bible writers may provide different emphases regarding the same event or topic, this will be without contradiction or misinterpretation. This is evidenced especially with parallel passages such as in the four Gospels. Each Gospel writer recorded what impressed him most under the inspiration of the Spirit, and each facet of the whole is needed in obtaining the full and balanced picture.

3. The Clarity of Scripture. The principle of the analogy of Scripture also involves the aspect of the clarity of Scripture. Adventists, with other Protestants, understand that the Bible is clear and precise. The biblical testimony encourages the readers to study the Bible for themselves to understand God’s message to them (Deut. 30:11–14; Luke 1:3, 4; Rev. 1:3).

The implication is that the meaning of Scripture is clear and straightforward, able to be grasped by the diligent student. Jesus illustrates this in His dealing with the lawyer. He asked him, “‘What is
written in the Law? . . . How do you read it?’” (Luke 10:26, NIV). In other words, He expected that the Bible could be understood. When the lawyer cited Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, Jesus commended him for having correctly answered (Luke 10:27). In numerous times in the Gospel accounts, Jesus made the same point: “‘Have you never read in the Scriptures . . . ?’” (Matt. 21:42, NIV) or an equivalent expression.

The consistent example of the Bible writers is that the Scriptures are to be taken in their plain, literal sense, unless a clear and obvious figure is intended. Note especially Jesus’ own distinction, and the disciples’ recognition, of the difference between literal and figurative language in John 16:25, 29. There is no stripping away of the “husk” of the literal sense in order to arrive at the “kernel” of the mystical, hidden, allegorical meaning, which only the initiated can uncover.

Scripture also maintains that there is a definite truth-intention of the biblical writers in any given statement, and not a subjective, uncontrolled multiplicity of meanings. Jesus and the apostles spoke with authority, giving not just one of many individual readings of a passage, but the true meaning as intended by the human writer and/or divine Author (Acts 3:17, 18). At the same time, the New Testament interpretation does not claim to exhaust the meaning of a given Old Testament passage; there is still room for careful exegesis. There are also instances in which the biblical writer intentionally used terminology or phraseology with a breadth of meaning that encompasses several different nuances indicated by the immediate context of the passage (John 3:3).

This is not to deny that some parts of Scripture point beyond themselves (e.g., typology, predictive prophecy, symbols, and parables) to an extended meaning or future fulfillment, but even in these cases, the extended meaning or fulfillment arises from, is consistent with, and in fact is an integral part of the specific truth-intention of the text; and Scripture itself indicates the presence of such extended meaning or fulfillment in such cases.

It is also true that not every portion of Scripture was fully understood by the original hearers, or even by the inspired writers. In 1 Peter 1:10–12, the apostle indicates that the Old Testament prophets may not have always clearly understood all the Messianic implications of their prophecies. Thus Peter implies another facet of the principle of the clarity of Scripture, that additional clearer revelation becomes a key to more fully understanding the less-clear passages. This same point seems implied also from a different perspective in 2 Peter 3:16, when Peter writes that some of the things Paul has written are “hard to understand” (NKJV). These difficult passages are not to be the starting point, which “the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction” (vs. 16, ESV), but are to be viewed in the larger context of clearer scriptural statements of truth (vs. 18).

The clarity of Scripture corollary also involves the concept of “progressive revelation.” Hebrews 1:1-3 indicates this progress in revelation from Old Testament prophets to God’s own Son (John 1:16–18). This is not progressive revelation in the sense that later Scripture contradicts or nullifies previous revelation, but in the sense that later revelation illuminates, clarifies, or amplifies the truths presented previously. So Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), does not nullify the precepts of the Decalogue, but strips away from them the accretions of erroneous tradition and
reveals their true depth of meaning and application. The basic insights on this fuller import of the law were already in the Old Testament, and Jesus enables these gems of truth to shine with even greater brilliance as they are freed from the distorted interpretations of some of the scribes and Pharisees. Progressive revelation also occurs in the sense that Jesus is the fulfillment of the various types and prophecies of the Old Testament.

A final practical application of this principle of clarity is to recognize the increasing spiral of understanding as one passage illuminates another. On one hand, later biblical authors wrote with conscious awareness of what has been written before and often assume and build upon what comes earlier. A close reading of a later passage may indicate echoes of, or allusions to, earlier passages, and the earlier passages in their context become the key to interpreting the fuller meaning of the latter (see, for example, the rich intertextuality in the Book of Revelation). On the other hand, earlier passages may not be fully understood until seen in the light of the later revelation. This is true in particular with typology and prophecy (Matt. 12:6, 42, 43). Thus, the spiral of understanding grows as later illuminates earlier, and earlier illuminates later.

D. Spiritual Things Spiritually Discerned (Spiritalia Spiritualiter Examinatur)

A fourth general principle of biblical interpretation concerns the issue of pre-understanding or objectivity. In modern hermeneutical approaches toward the Bible, both among conservative/evangelical and liberal critical scholars, it is often assumed that the original intent of the Bible writer can be ascertained by the rigorous application of hermeneutical principles and exegetical tools, quite apart from any supernatural spiritual assistance. Thus, non-Christians can determine the meaning of Scripture as well as Christians, if they use the tools and apply the principles correctly. This assumption is maintained in the laudable interest of upholding a degree of objectivity in interpreting the biblical text.

Scriptural data, however, lead to a different conclusion. Note in particular: “Who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. . . . The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:11, 14, ESV).

1. The Role of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Since the Bible is ultimately not the product of the human writer’s mind but of the mind of God revealed through the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12, 13), it is not possible to separate “what it meant” to the human writer—to be studied without the aid of the Holy Spirit, from “what it means”—to be applied by the help of the Spirit. Both the original meaning and its present application involve the thoughts of God, which according to Paul can be adequately comprehended only if we have the aid of the Spirit of God (John 6:45; 16:13).

Some have resisted letting the Spirit have a place in the hermeneutical spiral because it seems to them to allow the subjective element to overcome solid exegetical/hermeneutical research. It is
true that “spiritual exegesis” alone—that is, an attempt to rely totally on the Spirit without conscientiously applying principles of exegesis and hermeneutics arising from Scripture, can lead to subjectivism.

But the proper combination of dependence upon the Spirit with rigorous exegesis based upon sound hermeneutical procedures, far from leading to subjectivity, constitutes the only way of escaping subjectivity. Modern scholars are increasingly more willing to recognize that all come to the Scripture with their own preconceptions, presuppositions, and biases. This cannot be remedied by approaching the text “scientifically” without a “faith bias.” In fact, since the Scriptures call for a response of faith, an attempted neutral stance is already at cross-currents with the intent of Scripture (Matt. 13:11–17; John 6:69).

Believing and Spirit-led interpreters also come with their own biases and pre-understandings and are not impervious to error. But for Christians who believe the promises of Scripture, it is possible to ask God to transform their minds so that they increasingly adopt and incorporate the presuppositions of Scripture and not their own (Rom. 12:1). The Spirit of truth was promised to the disciples and to us: “‘When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth’” (John 16:13, NKJV). It must be noted that the “you” here is plural; the Spirit directs interpreters together in the fellowship of the church body (Ps. 119:63; Acts 2:42; 4:32), where they may be benefitted by exchange with and correction of other believers.

Interpreters must make a decision that their preconceptions will derive from and be under control of the Bible itself, and constantly be open for modification and enlargement on the basis of Scripture. They must consciously reject any external keys or systems to impose on Scripture from without, whether it be naturalistic (closed system of cause-and-effect without any room for the supernatural), evolutionary (the developmental axiom), humanistic (humankind the final norm), or relativistic (rejection of absolutes). They must ask the Spirit who inspired the Word to illuminate, shape, and modify their preconceptions according to the Word, and to guard their understandings to remain faithful to the Word.

2. The Spiritual Life of the Interpreter. The idea that spiritual things are spiritually discerned implies not only the need of the Spirit to aid in understanding, but also the spirituality of the interpreter. The Spirit not only illuminates the mind, but also must have transformed the interpreter’s heart. The approach of the interpreter must be that called for by Scripture, an attitude of consent or willingness to follow what Scripture says, if he or she is to understand Scripture’s meaning: “‘If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own’” (John 7:17, NIV).

There must be diligent, earnest prayer for understanding, after the example of David: “Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end” (Ps. 119:33, NKJV). There must be an acceptance by faith of what the prophets say (2 Chron. 20:20; John 5:46, 47).

In sum, the Bible cannot be studied as any other book, coming merely “from below” with sharpened tools of exegesis and honed principles of interpretation. At every stage of the interpretive
process, the book inspired by the Spirit can be correctly understood only "from above" by the illumination and transformation of the Spirit. God’s Word must be approached with reverence. Perhaps the best encapsulation of the interpreter’s appropriate stance before Scripture is recorded by Isaiah: “This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isa. 66:2, ESV).

**SPECIFIC GUIDELINES OR PROCEDURES FOR INTERPRETATION**

A. The Historical-Grammatical Method

The specific guidelines for interpreting biblical passages arise from and build upon the foundational presuppositions/principles we have observed in Scripture thus far. These guidelines encompass essentially the historical-grammatical (also called the historical-biblical) method. This robust hermeneutical method has its roots in Scripture itself: the biblical writers explicitly indicate basic presuppositions and principles of interpretation, and illustrate appropriate hermeneutical procedures as they conduct their own intertextual interpretation of earlier Scripture.

A Scripture-based hermeneutic has been carried on since biblical times by various interpreters with a high view of Scripture, including the early Jewish exegetes who followed Rabbi Hillel’s seven hermeneutical rules, the Antiochene school of interpretation in the early centuries of the Christian Church, and especially the Protestant Reformers of the 16th century and their followers in the conservative evangelical community. The historical-grammatical method is solidly affirmed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church today.

B. Biblical Interpretative Steps Arising from Scripture

Most Judeo-Christian writers on the subject of the proper hermeneutical approach to Scripture simply list the various interpretive steps. But a full commitment to *sola scriptura* would seem to imply that all these basic guidelines also either explicitly or implicitly arise from Scripture itself.

It may be appropriate here to point out that many modern scholars do not consider the Bible writers’ own hermeneutical practice a very helpful place to go for guidance in developing a sound hermeneutic. It is claimed that the New Testament writers often followed the first-century prevailing Jewish rabbinary methods of exegesis that were often not faithful to the original meaning of the Old Testament text.

But the published dissertation by David Instone-Brewer, which may be destined to rock the presuppositions of current critical scholarship regarding first-century Jewish exegetical methods, demonstrates that “the predecessors of the rabbis before 70 CE did not interpret Scripture out of context, did not look for any meaning in Scripture other than the plain sense, and did not change the text to fit their interpretation, though the later rabbis did all these things.” Brewer’s work calls for a fresh examination of New Testament exegetical methods in light of these conclusions. This new approach to the New Testament has already begun in recent decades, and a number of studies of
various New Testament passages have concluded that New Testament writers were careful to represent faithfully the original plain meaning of the Old Testament texts for the New Testament readers.

Some basic interpretative guidelines emerge from the Bible writers’ own hermeneutic.

1. **Text and Translation.** Since the focus of the hermeneutical enterprise is upon the written Word, it is of great importance that the original text of the Bible be preserved as much as possible. The Bible itself underscores the vital necessity of preserving the words of sacred Scripture (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:5, 6; Rev. 22:18, 19).

   The Bible has been carefully and painstakingly preserved down through the centuries to the present day, and the actual amount of variation among the many extant manuscripts is very small. Remarkable finds of ancient manuscripts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, the early Uncials of the New Testament, the Chester Beatty Papyri and others provide broad support for assurance that the text of our Bible is the most well attested of any set of documents from the ancient world. There are nonetheless, small variations arising either from scribal errors or intentional changes during the history of textual transmission. The science (or art) of recovering the original biblical text is termed textual study (sometimes called “textual criticism”). Textual scholars use a variety of criteria to determine what reading is the most likely or closest to the original text written by the author. An essential internal criterion is that the reading accepted as the original will be in fundamental harmony with the rest of Scripture. The principles of textual study must be carefully controlled from within Scripture.

   The Scriptures also give numerous examples of the need for a faithful translation of the words of Scripture into the target language (Neh. 8:8; Matt. 1:23; Heb. 7:2). There are several different modern translation types: formal “word-for-word equivalency” translations; dynamic “meaning-for-meaning equivalency” translations; a combination of formal and dynamic approaches; and the interpretive paraphrases. Each type has scriptural precedent. The translation of Scripture should remain as faithful as possible to both the form and content of the original.

2. **Historical Context/Questions of Introduction.** The Old Testament is largely a history book. The accounts of Creation, Fall, Flood, patriarchs, the emergence of Israel, Exodus, conquest of Canaan, judges, kings, and prophets of the united and divided monarchy, exile, return, and rebuilding of the Temple—all the persons, events, and institutions of the Old Testament are presented as straightforward history. The later Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the New Testament writers continually refer back to the earlier Old Testament accounts, interpreting these as historically reliable descriptions of God’s real space-time interrelationships with His people.

   The historical context of biblical narratives is accepted at face value as true, and there is thus no attempt to reconstruct history in a different way from that presented in the biblical record. The New Testament writers, in their interpretation of the Old Testament, show a remarkably clear acquaintance with the general flow and specific details of Old Testament history (see, e.g., Stephen’s speech in Acts 7; Paul’s discussion of the Exodus in 1 Corinthians 10). The typological arguments of
the New Testament writers assumed the historical veracity of the persons, events, and institutions that were types; in fact, the whole force of their typological argument depended upon the historicity of these historical realities.

In the inner-scriptural hermeneutic of biblical writers, mention is often made of various questions of introduction, and these questions sometimes become crucial to the Bible author’s argument. In each case, the plain declaration of the text is accepted as accurately portraying the authorship, chronology, and life setting for the text. For example, the Davidic authorship of Psalm 110 (as stated in the superscription of the psalm) is crucial to Jesus’ final clinching, unanswerable argument concerning His Messiahship (Matt. 22:41-46). Again, Davidic authorship of Psalm 16 is also crucial to Peter in his Pentecost sermon to convince the Jews of the predicted resurrection of the Messiah (Acts 2:25-35).

The life setting of Abraham’s justification by faith in the Genesis account is very significant in Paul’s argument to the Romans, to show that it was before Abraham had been circumcised that this had happened (Rom. 4:1-12). For Paul, there was no question of a hypothetically reconstructed life setting that gave rise to the account, but the apostle—and all the other biblical writers consistently throughout Scripture—accepted the life setting that was set forth in the biblical text.

Thus by precept and example Scripture underscores the importance of interpreting the biblical material in its literal, historical sense, including details of chronology, geography, and miraculous divine interventions in history.

3. Literary Context/Analysis. For the biblical writers, the literary context of the Scriptures was no less important than the historical context. Scripture is not only a history book, but a literary work of art. Scripture itself gives us countless explicit and implicit indicators of the presence of its literary qualities and the importance of recognizing these as part of the hermeneutical task. Recent study is giving increasing attention to the literary characteristics and conventions of Scripture.

One of the first tasks in interpreting a given passage in its immediate literary context is to determine the limits of the passage, in terms of paragraphs, pericopae, or stanzas. Even though the paragraph and chapter divisions of our modern versions of the Bible were added much later than biblical times, the Bible writers often provided indicators of passage limits and in their interpretation of antecedent Scripture show awareness of the discrete units of Scripture. The Book of Genesis, for example, is divided neatly into 10 sections, each identified by the phrase “the generations of . . . .” In the Psalms, along with the superscriptions introducing individual psalms, a number of psalms contain (a) stanzas that naturally divide the sections of the psalm, or (b) the word selah [71 times in Psalms], or (c) an acrostic [e.g., Psalm 119, with every succeeding eight verses starting with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet].

The Bible writers repeatedly identified their written materials in terms of specific genres or literary types. A few samples include: “history” or “account,” legal material, covenant making and renewal, riddles, court chronicles, psalms or songs, proverbs, prophetic oracles or “burdens,” visions, covenant lawsuit, lamentation, gospels, parables, “figures,” epistles, and apocalyptic. Each of these
genres has special characteristics that emerge from a careful study, and these characteristics are often significant in interpreting the message that is transmitted through the particular literary type. Literary form and interpretation of content go hand in hand.

In more general depiction of literary genre, the biblical materials separate themselves into poetry and prose. The poetic sections of Scripture (some 40 percent of the Old Testament) are characterized particularly by various kinds of parallelism ("thought rhyme") and to a lesser degree by meter and stanzas (or strophes). The prose may be of various kinds, such as narrative, legal, and cultic material. The prose sections, and in particular biblical narratives and discourse, have been the object of much recent intense study, revealing the intricate artistry involved in relating the narrative/discourse.

The literary structure, both on the macro-structural and micro-structural levels, is a crucial part of the analysis of a passage, often providing a key to the flow of thought or central theological themes. Bible writers have structured their material by such devices as matching parallelism (the Book of Jonah), reverse parallelism (or chiasm, e.g., the books of Leviticus, Ezekiel, and Song of Songs), inclusio or "envelope construction" (e.g., Ps. 8:1, 9; 103:1, 22), acrostic (Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145), qinah (3+2 meter, the Book of Lamentations), and suzerainty treaty components (the Book of Deuteronomy).

Many other literary techniques, conventions, and stylistic elements were utilized by the biblical writers. Irony, metonymy, simile, metaphor, synecdoche, onomatopoeia, assonance, paronomasia (pun/play on words)—all these literary features are important for the biblical writer as they contribute to the framing and forming of the message, and they are essential for interpreters who seek to understand the meaning of a given passage.

4. Grammatical/Syntactical/Semantic Analysis. Scripture, and in particular the New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament, provides evidence for engaging in the analysis of the grammatical forms and syntactical relationships, with attention to the meaning of various words in context, in order to arrive at the plain, straightforward meaning of the passage being interpreted.

A classic example of grammatical sensitivity on the part of the New Testament writers is in Paul’s interpretation of the word seed in Galatians 3. Citing several texts in Genesis, Paul recognized (Gal. 3:16) that the singular form of seed narrows in meaning to single Seed—the Messiah—while a few verses later (vs. 29) he correctly pointed to the collective plural aspect of this same term in its wider context.

A vivid example of the apostle’s syntactical sensitivity is in the citation of Psalm 45:6, 7 in Hebrews 1:8, 9: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions" (NKJV). The syntax of the Hebrew original points to One who is God, who is also anointed by God, thus implying the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Godhead.

There are numerous examples in Scripture in which New Testament writers were careful to
represent faithfully the meaning of crucial words in the original Old Testament passage. Note, for example, Paul’s use of “the just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17, citing Habakkuk 2:4); Matthew’s selection of virgin to best represent the Hebrew for the same word in Isaiah 7:14 (“the virgin shall conceive” (Matt. 1:22, 23, NIV); and Christ’s use of the word gods in John 10:34, citing Psalm 82:6.

Numerous other examples may be cited, in which the New Testament quotation of an Old Testament passage involves the New Testament writer’s recognition of the wider context of the Old Testament citation. This larger Old Testament context is frequently the key to understanding the interpretation drawn by the New Testament writer. For example, C. H. Dodd has shown how Peter alludes to the larger context of Joel 2 in his Pentecost sermon, and again, how Matthew’s interpretation of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 did not take the Old Testament passage out of context, but rather placed it in the larger context of the eschatological/Messianic New Exodus motif in Hosea and the other eighth-century prophets.

The grammatical-syntactical and semantic-contextual analysis often becomes more involved for us today than for those whose native tongue was the living biblical Hebrew/Aramaic or koine Greek languages. It is necessary now to make use of appropriate grammars, lexicons, concordances, theological wordbooks, and commentaries.

5. Theological Context/Analysis. The biblical writers provide abundant evidence for the need to ascertain the theological message of a passage as part of the hermeneutical enterprise.

For examples, Jesus laid bare the far-reaching theological implications of the Decalogue in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:17–28). The Jerusalem Council set forth the theological import of Amos 9:11, 12—that Gentiles need not become Jews to become Christians (Acts 15:13-21). Paul captured the theological essence of sin in various Old Testament passages (Rom. 3:8-20) and of righteousness by faith in his exposition of Genesis 15:6 and Psalm 32:1 and 2 (Romans 4). Peter’s sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2) delineated the theology of inaugurated eschatology found in Joel 2, and his first epistle explored the theological dimensions of the Messiah’s atoning work as set forth in Isaiah 53 (1 Peter 2:21-25).

The theological messages of the New Testament writers presuppose, build upon, and stand in continuity with the major Old Testament theological themes such as God, humankind, Creation-Fall, sin, covenant, Sabbath, law, promise, remnant, salvation, sanctuary, and eschatology.

The New Testament writers also placed their theological analyses of specific passages within the larger context of the multiplex “grand central theme” or metanarrative of Scripture as set forth in the opening and closing pages of the Bible (Genesis 1–3; Revelation 20–22): creation and the original divine design for this world; the rise of the cosmic moral conflict (Great Controversy) over the character of God, in the setting of the sanctuary; the plan of redemption-restoration centering in Christ and His atoning work; and the eschatological judgment and end of sin at the climax of history.

The theological thought-patterns of New Testament writers, though expressed in Greek, stayed within the trajectory of biblical Hebrew thought, and did not imbibe alien thought-forms of the prevailing surrounding culture such as Gnosticism and platonic dualism.
6. The Deeper Meaning of Scripture. Some parts of Scripture inherently point to a fulfillment beyond themselves, as in prophecy and typology; other parts point to an extended meaning beyond themselves, as in symbolism and parables. Each of these kinds of theological material in Scripture calls for special attention, and from within Scripture emerge principles for its interpretation.

In their exploration of the "deeper" meaning of Scripture, in particular with regard to the fulfillment of Old Testament types (whether persons, events, and institutions), the New Testament writers do not read back into the Old Testament what is not already there (inspired eisegesis), or what is not apparent to the human researcher (sensus plenior), or an arbitrary assigning of meaning that strips away the historical "husk" (allegory). Rather, they remain faithful to the Old Testament Scriptures, which have already indicated which persons, events, and institutions God has divinely designed to serve as prefigurations of Jesus Christ and the gospel realities brought about by Him. The New Testament writers simply announced the antitypical fulfillment of what had already been verbally indicated by the Old Testament prophets.

The New Testament writers do not give an exhaustive list of Old Testament types, but show the hermeneutical procedure, controlled by the Old Testament indicators, of identifying biblical types. Furthermore, the New Testament writers provide a theological (salvation-historical) substructure for interpreting the eschatological fulfillment of Old Testament types. Based upon a clear theological understanding of the theocratic kingdom of Israel and the kingdom prophecies within the context of covenant blessings and curses, the New Testament reveals a three-stage fulfillment of the Old Testament types and kingdom prophecies—in Christ, in the church, and in the apocalyptic conclusion of salvation history. Each stage has a different modality of fulfillment based upon the nature of Christ’s presence and reign. Thus, the New Testament writers have worked out a sound hermeneutic for interpreting the types and kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament, built upon solid controls arising from the Old Testament scriptures.

7. Contemporary Application. For the New Testament biblical writers, the contemporary application arises naturally out of their theological interpretation of Old Testament passages. We have just noted how the application of the types and kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament arises from understanding the three-stage fulfillment within salvation history. All the promises of God have their yes and amen in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). And all the Old Testament types find their basic fulfillment in Him. If we are spiritually part of the body of Christ, we therefore share in the fulfillment of those prophetic and typological promises, and yet await their final glorious literal apocalyptic fulfillment. These basic hermeneutical principles dealing with the fulfillment of Israel-centered prophecies in the New Testament provide a Christocentric approach that safeguards against dispensationalism and literalism.

The biblical writers insist that the message of Scripture is not culture-bound, applicable only for a certain people and a certain time, but permanent and universally applicable. Peter, citing Isaiah 40:6-8, forcefully stated, "having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because 'All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man
as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:23-25, NKJV).

Most of the ethical instruction in the New Testament gospels and epistles may be seen as the practical homiletic application of Old Testament passages: for example, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:17-32) applying the principles of the Decalogue; James’ application of the principles of Leviticus 19 throughout his epistle; and Peter’s ethical instruction building on “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16; citing Leviticus 11:44 and 45).

Of course, it is true that certain parts of the Old Testament, in particular the ceremonial/sanctuary ritual laws and the enforcement of Israel’s civil/theocratic laws, are no longer binding upon Christians. The New Testament writers did not arbitrarily (by a casebook approach to Scripture) decide what laws were still relevant, but they consistently recognized the criteria within the Old Testament itself indicating which laws are universally binding.

The general principle, then, articulated and illustrated by the New Testament writers in their homiletic application of Scripture, is to assume the transcultural and trans-temporal relevancy of biblical instruction unless Scripture itself gives us criteria limiting this relevancy. As William Larkin states it, “All Scripture, including both form and meaning, is binding unless Scripture itself indicates otherwise.”

The final goal of interpreting Scripture is to make practical application of each passage to the individual life. Christ and the apostles repeatedly drove home the message of the gospel contained in the Scriptures to bring the hearers or readers to salvation and an ever closer personal relationship with God.

At the Exodus, God articulated a principle in which each succeeding generation of Israelites should consider that they personally came out of Egypt (Ex. 12:26, 27), and this principle of personalization was repeated many times, both to Old Testament Israel (Deut. 5:2-4) and to spiritual Israel (Gal. 3:29; Rev. 15:1, 2). The Scripture should ultimately be read and accepted as if the readers were participants in the mighty saving acts of God—as if God’s messages were personally addressed to them. They are God’s living and active Word to the soul.

THE HISTORICAL-GRAMMATICAL VS. THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD

In contrast to the historical-grammatical method, another major method of biblical interpretation arose during the time of the Enlightenment (17th century), which has become known as the historical-critical method. Whereas the historical-critical method attempts to verify the truthfulness and to understand the meaning of biblical data on the basis of the principles and procedures of secular historical science, the historical-grammatical (also called the historical-biblical) method seeks to understand the meaning of biblical data by means of methodological considerations arising from Scripture alone.
The central presupposition of the historical-critical method is the principle of criticism. The term *criticism* is used by proponents of the historical-critical method in its technical sense of Cartesian “methodological doubt.” According to this principle, nothing is accepted authoritatively at face value; everything must be verified or corrected by rationally re-examining the evidence. The Bible is always open to correction, and therefore the human interpreter is the final determiner of truth and his or her reason is the final test of the authenticity of a passage. As Edgar McKnight summarizes: “The basic postulate [of the historical-critical method] is that of human reason and the supremacy of reason as the ultimate criterion for truth.”

With regard to the historical-critical method, and the principle of criticism in particular, Gerhard Maier, a noted German scholar who broke with the historical-critical method, writes: “A critical method must fail, because it represents an inner impossibility. For the correlative or counterpoint to revelation is not critique, but obedience; it is not correction of the text—not even on the basis of a partially recognized an applied revelation—but it is a let-me-be-corrected.”

As to the basic hermeneutical procedures, both the historical-critical and historical-biblical methods deal with historical context, literary features, genre or literary type, theology of the writer, the development of themes, and the process of canonization. But the historical-biblical approach rejects the principle of criticism; it analyzes, but refuses to critique the Bible; it accepts the text of Scripture at face value as true, and refuses to engage in the three-fold process of dissection, conjecture, and hypothetical reconstruction (often contrary to the claims of the text) that is at the heart of standard historical-critical analysis.

Some evangelical (including Adventist) scholars in recent decades have attempted to “rehabilitate” the historical-critical method by removing its anti-supernatural bias and other objectionable features and still retain the method. This is not really possible, however, because presuppositions and method are inextricably interwoven. The basis of the historical critical method is secular historical science, which by its very nature methodologically excludes the supernatural and instead seeks natural causes for historical events. Moreover, the fruits of this enterprise have not been encouraging. The process has continued the dismantling of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God.

As long as the basic principle of criticism (“methodological doubt”) is retained even to the slightest degree, the danger of the historical-critical method has not been averted, even though the supernatural element in theory may be accepted. And if this principle of criticism is removed, it ceases to be a historical-critical method. The presence or absence of the fundamental principle of criticism is really the litmus test of whether or not critical methodology is being employed. Seventh-day Adventists have taken an official stand against even a modified version of the historical-critical method which retains the principle of criticism: “Even a modified use of this [the historical-critical] method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists.”

Those who follow the historical-biblical method apply the same study tools utilized in historical
criticism. There is careful attention given to historical, literary, and linguistic, grammatical-syntactical, and theological details. But while utilizing the gains brought about by the historical-critical method in sharpening various study tools for analysis of the biblical text, there is a consistent intent in historical-biblical study to eliminate the element of criticism that stands as judge upon the Word.

In the past quarter of a century, there has been a major recent paradigm shift in critical biblical studies toward an emphasis upon various new literary-critical hermeneutical approaches. These critical procedures usually do not deny the results of historical criticism, nor abandon the central principle of criticism, but rather bracket out the historical questions concerning the historical development of the biblical text and concentrate upon its final canonical shape.

Many of these literary-critical hermeneutical approaches focus upon the final form of the biblical text as a literary work of art. These synchronic approaches (i.e., approaches that deal with the final form of the text) include such (overlapping) procedures as rhetorical criticism, New Literary criticism, and close reading. Common to all of these is the concern for the text as a finished work of art.

Seventh-day Adventists welcome this renewed interest upon the synchronic analysis of the received canonical form of the biblical text, and appreciate many of the literary tools of analysis developed within these approaches. Unfortunately, however, in these approaches as commonly practiced by critical scholars, the literary productions of the Bible are usually divorced from history and regarded as works of fiction or myth, with their own “autonomous imaginative universe” and “imitation of reality.” Emphasis is placed upon the various literary conventions utilized (consciously or unconsciously) by the writers as they creatively crafted the fictional biblical “story” into a literary work of art. Such presuppositions that ignore, or go against, the historical claims of the biblical texts are rejected by Adventist interpreters.

Another recent synchronic approach is biblical structuralism. Its main purpose is to “decode” the text to uncover the subconscious “deep-structures” universally inherent in language that deterministically impose themselves upon the writer. The divine absolute in this method is replaced by an absolute from below—the deep structures of language. A related literary approach is semiotics, or “sign-theory,” which focuses upon the linguistic codes that form the framework within which the message of the text is given (much like the musical staff and clef in music where the specific notes may be placed). The concern of these approaches is upon neither the history nor the meaning of the text, but upon the layers of linguistic structures or sign-systems underlying the message. These approaches have limited value in Adventist hermeneutics inasmuch as fundamental presuppositions tend to compromise the sola scriptura principle.

In recent decades, a number of postmodern approaches to Scripture have been developed that retain the critical presuppositions of the historical-critical method but focus attention upon other goals than hypothetically reconstructing the historical development of the biblical text. Some of these postmodern approaches build upon new trends that have been addressed previously. Major examples include: philosophical hermeneutics, hermeneutics of socio-critical theory (sociological, liberation,
and feminist); reader-response criticism, and deconstructionism.

In these postmodern methodologies, no longer is there a single objective, normative meaning of Scripture: rather there is a feminist reading, a black reading, an Asian reading, a Latino reading, etc. All are seen to have their own validity as the reader’s horizon merges with the horizon of the biblical text. These latter approaches have provided some useful insights into the biblical text, and rightfully point out the need for the modern interpreter to recognize his or her individual cultural context, but the common tendency is to have some external norm—be it philosophy, sociology, Marxist political theory, feminism, or the subjectivism of the reader—that replaces the *sola scriptura* principle and relativizes Scripture.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms the hermeneutic of the biblical writers and the Protestant Reformation, and rejects the historical-critical method of the Enlightenment and its later post-Enlightenment developments. Seventh-day Adventists are the hermeneutical heirs of the Reformation. In the spirit of the Reformers, and in harmony with the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, interpreters seek to base all their presuppositions and principles of interpretation, their faith and practice, upon the absolute authority of God’s infallible Word.

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**NOTES AND REFERENCES**


Identity, Exclusivity, and Inclusivity

Tolerance of others pertains to one of the many paradoxes of Christianity.

Stephen Bauer

As a teenager,¹ I read an intriguing article in a *Reader's Digest*-like magazine that argued that to teach our children to be generous, we must first instruct them to be selfish. In reality, what the article actually claimed was that some things owned by the child should be reserved for the child’s exclusive use without having to share, while the remainder must be shareable. Doing this, it was argued, would enable generosity with the non-reserved portion.

Though I have difficulty labeling the concept of an exclusive, reserved portion as selfish—making such a reservation was something God Himself did in Eden—the original sales pitch is nonetheless somewhat appealing: One must be selfish in order to be generous. Even though the original proposal is misstated, its paradoxical character is intriguing. A similar paradox seems to exist in Christianity and is visible in the earliest records of the Christian Church, the New Testament. One side of the paradox is highlighted in the theme chosen for 2011 Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society: “No Other Name.”

Ostensibly, “No Other Name” is a reference to Peter’s statement in Acts 4:12: “‘Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.’”² The message here seems clear and unambiguous. Peter asserts to the assembled Sanhedrin that Christ is the sole means of salvation appointed by God. Such a claim points to the exclusivity of Christ and a demarcation of communal identity based on whether or not one believes in and confesses this exclusivity of Christ.

By contrast, the theme for 2011 Conference of the Adventist Society of Religious Studies —"Gates and Walls: Inclusiveness and Exclusiveness and the People of God"—directs us toward the opposite side of the paradox. A faith that preaches an exclusively defined way to salvation is called to reach every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In short, our exclusive claims about Christ call us to be inclusive, inviting nonbelievers to enter our fellowship and become fellow believers. Is it possible that we living in a paradox in which to be inclusive, we must first be exclusive?

Exclusivity and the Church

In Peter’s daring claim of Acts 4:12 to the Sanhedrin, he clearly challenges the established Jewish order, charging that a Christless Judaism cannot save anyone. In short, Peter is making a very radical claim: There is no other way to salvation than Christ. Why is Peter’s claim so important?

Through the first nine chapters of Acts, Peter is the prominent church leader, and seems to act
as the spokesperson for the church. It is he who preaches the Pentecostal sermon in Acts 2 and calls the multitude to be baptized. Likewise, it is he who speaks to the lame man healed by the Beautiful Gate, and who addresses the people in the temple in response to that healing. Upon their detention by the temple police for proclaiming Christ in the temple, it is he who addresses the Sanhedrin in response, and it is in this address that he makes his claim concerning the exclusivity of Christ.

Furthermore, Peter is the authority figure who confronts Ananias and Sapphira, and it is he, along with John, who is asked to go to Samaria to check out the new body of believers (Acts 8). Even after the appearance of Paul, Peter continues to be a prominent, if not dominant, figure in Acts up into chapter 15. Hence, he appears to be one of the prominent leaders in the early church, and in that role, he proclaimed Christ as the exclusive way given by God for attaining salvation.

In Acts 9, a new character appears in the church who would surpass Peter in leadership, a man later known as Paul. It could be said that Paul shaped the formation of the early church in a similar way to Ellen White’s role in the formation of the Adventist Church. He is the most prolific author of our New Testament, with 14 books, and Pauline theology continues to incite debate across Christianity to this day. Despite his great prominence in the early church, however, Paul openly recognized Peter’s prominence.

Paul cast Peter in a pivotal role in Galatians, going out of his way to show that he and Peter were united in the meaning of the gospel. Paul’s first trip to Jerusalem after his conversion sees him visit only Peter and James. Only Peter and James are named in reference to his second visit, and then there is the confrontation with Peter as well (Galatians 1–2). Paul describes Peter as the apostle to the Jews, while describing himself as the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul thus expresses his recognition of their co-prominence as leaders in the church.

This co-prominence is further seen in Acts 15, where Peter, the apostle to the Jews, is the one who introduces the resolution that Gentiles need not be circumcised, and then is supported by Paul. Interestingly, Peter’s speech is recorded verbatim, while Paul’s is only summarized. In harmony with Peter’s statement to the Sanhedrin, Paul would make similar claims about the exclusivity of Christ, but in a much more developed way.

Paul highlights the exclusivity of Christ through use of the “in Christ” motif, especially in Colossians and Ephesians. As Andrew Lincoln notes, “the phrase has a great variety of force, which must be derived through the context in which it is found. Most frequently its use is instrumental, so that it means ‘through Christ’s agency.’” For Paul, God created the world “in Christ” and “through Christ” (Col. 1:16). Similarly, Paul also argued that God’s redemption is found “by Christ” (Rom. 3:24), eternal life is “in Christ” (6:23), God was in Christ reconciling the world (2 Cor. 5:19), God’s love for us is “in Christ” (Rom. 8:1), we are sanctified “in him” (1 Cor. 1:2), God’s grace is given “in Christ” (vs. 4), we are justified “in Christ” (Gal. 2:17), all will be resurrected “in Christ” (1 Cor. 15:22), and God upholds the world “in Christ” (Col. 1:16).

Additionally, in Ephesians, we are told that God blesses us “in Christ” (1:3), chose us “in him” (vs. 4), has accepted us “in the One” (vs. 6), redeems and forgives us “in him” (vs. 7), and is uniting...
all things "in Christ" (vs. 10). Using the parallel expression, "through Christ," Paul even asserts that God judges the world “through Jesus Christ” (Rom. 2:16). Paul’s message seems abundantly clear. All of God’s actions toward this world—from creation to sustaining to blessing to saving to judging—all God’s actions and interactions with the world are conducted through Christ as God’s divine agent. This is why Paul asserts Christ is the exclusive mediator between God and humankind (1 Tim. 2:5). Vincent Branick observes that Christ is “part of the ultimate agency of God” and “is God’s instrument of justice and salvation.” For Paul, Christ is the only avenue through which God relates to this world. Hence there can be no other way of salvation or any other mediator.

Paul reinforces the exclusive role of Christ in one’s salvation in Romans 10. Here he urges that people are saved and justified by confessing with their lips and believing in their hearts that Jesus rose from the dead (vss. 9, 10). “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (vs. 13). Paul then asks the obvious question: How can people call on Christ to be saved if they have not believed? And how can they believe, so they can call, so they can be saved (vs. 14)? For Paul, standard gospel procedure is that people must hear, so they can believe, so they can call on the name of Christ to be saved. No other name will suffice, for Christ is the exclusive agent that God uses for all His dealings with this world. Christ alone is God’s appointed way.

Paul, however, does hint at a type of exception to standard operating procedure. In Romans 2, he speaks of Gentiles who are ignorant of God’s law yet obey it as if it were written in the heart. These “doers of the law” will be “justified,” he asserts, but they will miss out on the assurance that comes with being righteous by faith. Their hearts accuse and excuse them (vss. 13-16). In Paul’s mind, however, even these folk are surely saved by Christ, God’s only agent for relating to humankind. They just won’t know it until the Second Coming.

It is interesting, then, that the two prominent leaders of the early church preached Christ as the exclusive agent of and means to salvation for humanity. They proclaimed this common belief because their teaching came from the same source: Christ himself. Peter was an eyewitness to Christ’s earthly ministry and teachings, and Paul claimed he received the gospel without human agency through a revelation from Christ Himself. Hence a basic unity on this matter is not surprising. We have an inspired memoir that records Christ’s teaching activity during His earthly ministry, in part, in the Gospel of John.

**Jesus and Exclusivity**

Two statements of Christ, recorded by John, are suggestive of the exclusivity of Christ later proclaimed by Peter and Paul. The first is John 14:6: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” In the fourth Gospel, this statement occurs during the last supper. Jesus has announced that He is leaving and that the disciples cannot come with Him. The disciples panic, and Christ responds with the famous passage, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. . . . I am going . . . to prepare a place for you. I will come back” (vss. 1-3). He then reminds them that they know the way to where He is going (vs. 4).
Thomas immediately asserts that they do not know where Christ is going and thus cannot know the way (vs. 5). Jesus replies that He is the way, the only way to the Father. Hence, the Father is the destination and Christ is the way to Him. The key point is in the simple, unambiguous phrase, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (vs. 6). As Paul would confirm later, Christ presents Himself as the only link between the Father and humankind. As Gail O’Day notes, “In Jesus, the incarnate Word, the Son of God, one can see and know God in a manner never before possible.”

The second passage recording Christ’s teaching is in John 10. In this passage Jesus uses the imagery of doors and walls for a sheepfold. Interestingly Christ casts Himself both as the shepherd and as the door. Focusing on the latter, Gerald Borchert reminds us that, “The sheepfold was a place of security, not a place for intruders. Such a sheepfold would likely have been either a circular or square enclosure, probably constructed like a high stone fence or wall and perhaps topped with vines. The entrance would have been the only break in the wall, and once the sheep were safely inside at night, the watchman/guard (either a servant or a shepherd, usually an assistant) would lie down across the opening and serve both as the protector of the sheep and as a gate to the sheepfold. Unless an intruder was willing to confront the watchman, the only way into the sheepfold was to climb the wall.”

By contrast, as Borchert notes, “access for the shepherd was quite another matter. He could enter the sheepfold through the opening and check his sheep anytime he desired because he was known both to the watchman and to the sheep.”

It is interesting that like the gate of an ancient city, the sheepfold door is not cast as a means of unfettered access and egress. Thus, gates or doors, like walls, were viewed as part of the security system protecting the city or the flock from outside dangers. The New Jerusalem has 12 gates, yet we are told: “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” (Rev. 22:14, 15). Gates thus control access to provide safety. Gateways with no gate offer unrestricted access, undermining security.

Interestingly, in the sheepfold setting, it turns out that the shepherd could also act as the door to the fold. Merrill Tenney notes that “upon returning home with the flock, the shepherd stood at door and inspected each sheep entering. He anointed wounds, removed thorns, and gave drinks of water. When all the sheep were in, the shepherd would lay down across the opening and become the door.” Tenney concludes, “The emphatic singular pronoun ‘I’ emphasizes that the shepherd is the sole determiner of who enters the fold and who is excluded. It parallels the later statement: ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ (John 14:6).”

J. H. Bernard agrees, saying, “In v. 7 the stress is laid on Jesus being the Door through which a lawful shepherd would enter. But here [v. 9] the thought is simpler. He is the Door through which the sheep must enter the fold, . . . . He is the door to the spiritual fold, as He is the Way (and the only way) of access to the Father (14:6; cf. Eph 2:18, Heb 10:20). . . . The saying I am the Door has
always been quoted, from the first century onward, as having as wide an application as the parallel saying, *I am the Way.*” It should not be surprising, then, with Christ’s claims to be the only means of legitimate access to God, that we find Peter and Paul, the two prominent leaders of the early church, proclaiming the same essential message. Christ alone gives us access to God.

Because Christ is the only door, and the only true shepherd, a sense of unique identity is established. Arthur Gossip notes, “In these verses [10:1-5] our Lord challenges the action, and indeed the authority in more than name, of those who had excommunicated the once-blind man; claims that he himself is the real shepherd of God’s flock; and that it is those who recognize his voice and follow him who are the true heirs of the promises and the genuine people of God. . . . With confidence Jesus lays it down that those who are really his respond in certain ways. . . . A stranger they will not follow.”

Those who follow the voice of Christ receive a unique identity. They are His sheep and not those of another shepherd. Only the sheep belonging to the right shepherd can enter a particular fold. Their identity is established through their relationship to the shepherd, and hence they form a defined, separate flock, following the voice of the exclusive, God-man shepherd who leads them. Yet it is this relational identity, separating the sheep of Christ from the surrounding flocks to Himself, that sets up the possibility of inclusiveness. Christ notes there are other sheep in other folds who need bringing in (John 10:16). And thus we have returned to our opening paradox. Why must we first be exclusive, in order to be inclusive?

**Beckwith’s Paradox**

Francis Beckwith states: “Many people see moral relativism as necessary for promoting tolerance, non-judgmentalism, and inclusiveness, for they think if one believes one’s moral position is correct and others’ incorrect, one is close-minded and intolerant. I will argue . . . that relativism itself cannot live up to its own reputation, for it is promoted by its proponents as the only correct view on morality. This is why relativists typically do not tolerate nonrelativist views, judge those as mistaken, and maintain that relativism is exclusively right.”

Further, Beckwith observes that “the principle of tolerance is considered one of the key virtues of relativism.” He then reveals a paradox: “The moral relativist embraces the view that one should not judge other cultures and individuals, for to do so would be intolerant. . . . Ironically, the call to tolerance by relativists presupposes the existence of at least one nonrelative, universal, and objective norm: tolerance.”

The fact that tolerance functions as an absolute moral value causes the relativist a problem. Thus, in another volume co-authored with Gregory Koukl, Beckwith levels the challenge that “if there are no objective moral rules, . . . there can be no rule that requires tolerance as a moral principle that applies equally to all.” Beckwith summarizes his complaints in three points. “First, the relativist says that if you believe in objective moral truth you are wrong. Hence relativism is judgmental. Second, it follows from this that relativism is excluding your beliefs from the realm of legitimate
options. Thus relativism is exclusivist. And third, because relativism is exclusivist, all nonrelativists are automatically not members of the 'correct thinking' party. So relativism is partisan.\textsuperscript{15}

Beckwith concludes that the moral relativist is thus confronted with a dilemma: “Judging someone as wrong makes one intolerant, yet one must first think another is wrong in order to be tolerant.”\textsuperscript{16} Put another way, because relativism has an absolute moral standard—tolerance—while denying there are absolute moral standards and because tolerance acts judgmentally and intolerantly, Beckwith charges that “Ethical relativism is thus repudiated by itself.”\textsuperscript{17}

In Shakespearian imagery, the moral relativist is “hoist[ed] with his own petard,” or, as expressed by Paul, “You who pass judgment on someone else, . . . are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things” (Rom. 2:1). This paradox, however, can work in reverse as well.

Beckwith explores the obverse side of the tolerance paradox by arguing that to be tolerant of others in moral debate, one must first be an absolutist. Arguing from a major dictionary definition of tolerance, Beckwith asserts, “tolerance, then involved permitting or allowing a conduct or point of view you think is wrong while respecting the person in the process. Notice that we cannot tolerate others unless we disagree with them. We don’t tolerate people who share our views. Instead, tolerance is reserved for those we think are wrong.”\textsuperscript{18}

In his other volume, Beckwith refines his point: “Tolerance presupposes a moral judgment of another’s viewpoint. That is to say, I can only be tolerant of those ideas that I think are mistaken. I am not tolerant of that with which I agree; I embrace it. And I am not tolerant of that for which I have no interest (e.g., European professional soccer); I merely have benign neglect for it. (That is, I don’t care one way or another.)”\textsuperscript{19}

The problem, then, is this. To be tolerant, I must first believe something is right or wrong, but to believe something is right or wrong implies some kind of definite standard that reveals the rightness or wrongness of the issue in question. On the basis of Beckwith’s observations, it seems that the moral relativist is, in reality, a closet moral absolutist, making moral judgments of others’ views based on fixed standards of good and evil as defined by moral relativism.

It thus seems impossible to avoid espousing fixed, absolute moral standards in some form or other, and hence the reversal is now complete. In order to be tolerant, one must first have clear, defined standards to know whom to tolerate. Relativism along with its moral norm of tolerance together become entrenched, fixed markers of identity, thus creating boundaries with which to determine who is included in the ranks of the faithful and who is not.

Similarly, when a proposed moral norm like inclusiveness or tolerance becomes the litmus test of identity, such an issue becomes invested, not only with the absolute of a fixed standard, but also with a quasi-political nature that, like medieval church power, seeks to oppress or eliminate dissidence. A crusade mentality is easily inculcated, fostering a fundamental exclusion of contradictory views, relegating them to inferior status. Therefore, for inclusiveness to achieve its stated purpose, there must be some other basis of identity that allows us to recognize who is not part
of our “fold” so that we can reach out inclusively. The paradox, then, is that we must have a clear, exclusive identity based in something other than inclusiveness, in order to be inclusive. Further clarity about this paradox is brought through Christ’s teaching about walls and gates in the sheepfold. Christ says His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. They will not follow the voice of a stranger. We cannot be inclusive until our identity is defined, not by a cause or crusade, but by a person—Jesus Christ. Only an identity centered in one’s personal relationship with Christ can be properly inclusive, for, as we have seen, once inclusivity becomes a cause defining our identity, it becomes exclusive and intolerant. Responding positively to Christ’s voice and following Him as one’s Shepherd become the two identifying marks of the sheep’s identity in Jesus’ teaching about the sheepfold. In regard to the second identity marker, we must thus ask, Where does Jesus go that the sheep follow?

First, the sheep follow Christ in dependence on the Father. Christ twice stated that He did nothing of His own except as given by the Father (John 6:57, 58). This is the same Jesus who rebutted Satan by declaring we are to live by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4), and who frequently appealed to “it is written” as the governing basis of His choices and actions. The sheep follow Jesus as He lays aside personal rights in sacrificial service to others (Phil. 2:5-8; 1 Corinthians 9). They follow Jesus to the cross saying, ”’Not my will, but yours be done’” (Luke 22:42). They follow Christ into the paradox of saving one’s life by losing it (Matt. 16:25). They follow Christ to the mount of blessing with its supercharged moral purity that probes far deeper than mere rule-compliance morality (Matthew 5–7). And it is on this mountain that we find godly inclusivity.

”’But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect’” (Matt. 5:44-48).

The language of “enemies” shows a clear sense of identity in the sheep. They know who belongs to the fold and who are enemies. It is this exclusive identity—being His sheep and no one else’s—that calls us to model God’s grace and reach out to those not in the fold and to woo them into fellowship with the Shepherd, and thus into fellowship with the sheep.

Paul is clear that Christ died for us while we were still enemies, undeserving of any divine favor (Rom. 5:10). The woman caught in adultery exemplifies this principle. Based in her own qualifications, she had no hope of divine favor and was fully aware of her full deservedness of condemnation and judgment. Yet Jesus lifted the condemnation, calling her to a new life free of the sinful ways of the past. Thus, to snobbishly ignore or to scornfully reject interaction and fellowship with those differing from our “fold” is to subvert the work of the Shepherd who goes out into the wilderness to find lost sheep and return them to the safety of the fold. Pious separatism from those differing from us undermines the example of the one who ate with Pharisees, publicans, and
prostitutes. There must be a fold that determines identity so we can see to whom we should reach out, yet with a door that provides both a protected haven of safety from intruders and accessibility for the inclusion of more sheep.

Paradoxically, then, it is precisely our hopeless estate under divine judgment that prepares the way for God’s grace. This is because grace is undeserved favor, and undeservedness is established through divine judgment. God consigns all under sin (Gal. 3:22) in order to bring grace to all (Titus 2:11).

Commenting on the Old Testament influences on Paul’s doctrine of salvation, Branick observes that, “Jewish faith held together the divine traits of live-giving love and deadly anger by a third personality trait, divine justice or righteousness. . . . This righteousness or justice often appears in the Bible in images of God as judge. In the prophetic tradition, God arises as judge against his people and against the nations to punish their sins where God is both witness, accuser, and judge in a forensic scenario.” Branick adds, “The ‘wrath’ of God against his sinful people is a theme that dominates the writings of the prophets.”20 And herein lies the paradox, for, as Branick testifies, “In the Jewish faith, only God can save from the wrath of God.”21

For Paul, Christ—in whom all the fullness of deity dwells bodily (Col. 2:9)—saves us from God’s wrath (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 5:9). Paradoxically, then, it is precisely our hopeless estate under divine judgment that prepares the way for grace. Thus Paul notes he was a persecutor of the church, “not worthy to be called an apostle” (1 Cor. 15:9, NKJV), but “by the grace of God I am what I am” (vs. 10, NKJV). It is when I recognize I am an enemy of God, under the just condemnation of the judgment, without hope, that I am ready to be surprised by God’s grace. Receiving God’s grace as a recovering enemy of God becomes the basis of my showing grace to others. The one who is forgiven much, loves much (Luke 7:47).

And such are the paradoxes of the kingdom of God. God wounds that He may heal (Hosea 6:1). If you try to save your life, you will lose it, but if you lose your life for Christ and the gospel, you save it (Matt. 16:25). The first shall be last and the last shall be first (20:16). “Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant” (23:11). It should be no surprise, then, that we need judgment to have grace and an exclusive identity in Christ to be inclusively gracious to others.

To return to the opening paradox: To be generous with their toys, children need a reserved subset for their exclusive use, without having to share. Forcing them to share everything they own will engender the desire to share nothing. Having something exclusive provides the basis for being generous.

May the paradox intrigue you as it has me, and may our identity in the exclusive shepherd, the God-man Jesus Christ lead us to demonstrate redemptive, gracious, and respectful relationships with those outside our ideological folds.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This article is adapted from Steve Bauer’s address as president of the Adventist Theological Society in a joint
ATS-ASRS meeting on November 18, 2011, in San Francisco.

2. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this article are quoted from the *New International Version* of the Bible.


4. Quotation marks indicate a use of the “in Christ” motif. The actual Greek text may include pronouns like “in him” or other referents such as “in the beloved,” but all are attestations of the “in Christ” motif.


8. Ibid.


13. Ibid., p. 11.


21. Ibid., p. 90.
Sabbath and Sanctification

For the Israelites, the Sabbath signified initial and ongoing sanctification through divine intervention.

Roy E. Gane

Exodus 31 places a brief divine speech regarding the weekly Sabbath (vss. 12-17) immediately after the Lord’s detailed instructions for building Him a sanctuary (Ex. 25:1–31:11). The Sabbath section begins: “The Lord said to Moses: ‘You yourself are to speak to the Israelites: “You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you”’” (31:12, 13).1

The basic appropriateness of the Sabbath as a sign that the Lord sanctifies His covenant people seems fairly transparent. “Israelites imitate God and partake of his Holiness” by participating in cessation from work on the seventh day (Lev. 19:2, 3), which He sanctified when He ceased from His work at the end of the creation week (Gen. 2:2, 3). In this way they acknowledge to God and to other peoples that He is the intrinsically holy Creator and Source of holiness, and that He shares His holiness with time, people, and things, such as the sanctuary, that He bonds to Himself. Just as consecrated priests have access to the holy sanctuary in space (e.g., Leviticus 8; Numbers 18), all Israelites enjoy access to the holy temple in time—the Sabbath—because God makes them holy.

It is not the Israelites’ own Sabbath rest that sanctifies them. Rather, the Lord Himself did this. Their Sabbath observance signified that they accept His gift of holiness. The free nature of the gift is emphasized by the fact that its sign—the Sabbath—involves no work. To the contrary, it is refreshing, liberating rest from work.

The covenant signs of the rainbow and circumcision testify to miracles: deliverance from the Flood and a line of descendants for Abraham and post-menopausal Sarah. Sabbath is a covenant sign of two miracles: Creation (Ex. 31:17), and later the sanctification of Israel (vs. 13). That Israel’s sanctification is a miracle should be obvious to anyone who casually peruses the narratives of Exodus and Numbers.

What kind of change does Israel’s sanctification effect? Since Sabbath rest signifies both Creation and sanctification, there should also be a thematic connection between them. Does the fact that the sanctified Creation memorial also celebrates the sanctification of God’s people imply that the latter is a kind of re-creation, accomplished by divine creative power?

To consider these questions, it is helpful to observe the following characteristics the term “sanctify you” in Exodus 31:13.

1. It refers to transfer or transformation of someone to a state of holiness.
2. The form is a participle, indicating that this sanctification is an ongoing process.
3. The you is plural, referring to all Israelites. Holiness is for everyone, rather than restricted to an elite group.

Transfer or Transformation to Holiness

Sanctify in Exodus 31:13 means to make, treat, or declare something or someone holy, whether this transfer or transformation is expressed in terms of dedication, consecration, or sanctification. So the semantic range is broader than sanctification as growth in character that is the work of a lifetime.

When the Lord transferred/transformed the Israelites to holiness, He did not instantly make them morally perfect. This is jarringly demonstrated by the fact that the golden calf apostasy begins in Exodus 32:1, just two verses after the Sabbath section ends in 31:17. This covenant-shattering fiasco was hardly in God’s plan for Israel’s sanctification, but rather, interrupted it. Israel’s sanctification operated between the extremes of instant perfection and apostasy.

When the Israelites first arrived at Mt. Sinai, the Lord articulated His vision for their holiness: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:4-6).

Here several aspects shape the profile of Israel’s holy relationship to God. First, He has already demonstrated His love by liberating the Israelites and miraculously bringing them to Himself. “Exodus makes it clear that God, not a place, was the destination of the liberated people” because “what they were meant to be could only be found in what God is.” The holy God makes His people holy by restoring them to union with Himself as their Lord.

Second, the Israelites can enjoy the privilege of being God’s chosen, treasured possession, which means that they were to serve Him as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. By living in harmony with Him as His special people and receiving the blessings that He lavishes upon them (Lev. 26:3-13), they were to be His representatives (“priests”) in order to show His holy character to other nations and share the blessings with them (cf. Gen. 12:2-3; 22:17, 18).

Third, being the Lord’s treasured possession was conditional upon obedience to Him and keeping His covenant (Ps. 105:43-45). As the Creator and supreme Sovereign, He has no need or desire to exploit human energy or material resources for His own well-being or profit. So His yoke is easy and His burden is light. If His people, whom He has redeemed to enjoy His benevolent rule, disloyally violate His principles, they express ungrateful rebellion and thwart His missiological purpose by misrepresenting Him. So damage control requires that God distance Himself from them, as evidenced by suspension of the blessings that come only with His rule.

Through the process of delivering Israel, God made the nation holy to Himself. The fact that the Lord directed the Israelites to keep Sabbath, the sign of sanctification, in the wilderness before reaching Mt. Sinai suggests that He was then already engaged in the process of sanctifying them, in
spite of their lapses in faith. Pentateuchal Sabbath legislation links these concepts: In Exodus 31, Sabbath signifies that the Lord sanctifies His people (vs. 13), and in the Deuteronomy Decalogue, the reason for observing this day is the fact that He brought them out of slavery in Egypt “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (Deut. 5:15).

As the motivation for Sabbath observance, deliverance in Deuteronomy is the functional equivalent of the Lord’s rest, blessing, and consecration of the seventh day at the end of the creation week in Exodus 20:11. Creation and deliverance are linked. At the time of the Exodus, God deployed His power over creation to cause the 10 plagues (chaps. 7–12) and the Red Sea crossing (chap. 14), through which He enabled the Israelites to rest from slavery and be holy to Him. By resting on Sabbath, they acknowledged enjoyment of their re-created or reborn freedom, identity, and life with the Creator and Re-Creator, which gave them hope. "Biblical hope is a vision of the future that is paradoxically channeled through memory. As the event of creation is remembered, one can think of the event of recreation; therefore, one can hope."

Keeping in mind the difference between Israelite national deliverance and Christian individual salvation, we can find instructive analogies between the two. Just as Israel enjoyed rebirth and the beginning of sanctification, Christian conversion involves “new birth” (John 3:3-8) and initial sanctification or consecration (1 Cor. 1:2, 30). Paul even parallels Israel and Christians by referring to the “baptism,” implying a kind of conversion, of the former (10:1, 2). The apostle sees value in learning from the Israelites’ experience. For him, salvation is not an abstract theoretical exercise; it is a story.

There is another aspect to Israel’s story: The role of sacrifices in the process of the nation’s “conversion,” by which it became holy. First, the Israelites accepted the Lord’s provision for saving their firstborn by applying the blood of their Passover sacrifices to the doors of their dwellings. Later, their bond with God was cemented when Moses tossed the blood of the covenant sacrifices both on the Lord’s altar and on the people.

Because the Lord spared the firstborn, they were holy to Him, which meant that they belonged to Him. They were representatives of all Israel, which God regarded as His firstborn son. So on the basis of the Passover sacrifice, which ransomed the lives of the firstborn, and redeemed the nation from the pharaoh, all the people were holy to God. Divine ransom and redemption produce holy ownership, i.e., consecration.

As our Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7), Christ has ransomed and redeemed us. If we accept this provision, we are justified rather than culpable and condemned, and we are holy in the sense that we belong to God (Rom. 12:1). As the Lord freed the Israelites from domination by the pharaoh, “He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13, 14).

Entering a new kind of life, we become “participants of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), enjoying the transforming benefits of Christ’s indwelling Presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who pours into our hearts divine love, thereby progressively bringing us into harmony with God’s
character (1 John 4:8) and law (Matt. 22:37-40). These gifts are ongoing and produce progressive effects in the character, but they first come with conversion, and without them, conversion has not taken place (Rom. 8:9). Without this divine assistance to pull us out of our deep ruts and set us on the road, reorienting us in the right direction, our journey with God cannot even begin.

Here is an illustration. My father-in-law, Richard Clark, was born in China to missionary parents. In 1940 he was 11 years old, living in the city of Hankow, and recovering from a second bout of polio. His father acquired a bicycle for him to exercise and regain strength. He rode it on a smooth, newly paved road in the French Concession part of the city. Alongside the road on either side were ditches, about five feet deep, that drained city sewer. There had been iron grates over them, but poor people had stolen them and sold them to the Japanese, who were occupying the country, for recycling into war materials.

One day as Richard made a U-turn, he swung a bit wide and fell into the open drainage ditch, with his bicycle wedged above him. A crowd of amused people gathered around to see the plight of the helpless “foreign devil.” But a Japanese sentry elbowed his way to Richard, reached down with a smile, and pulled him out of the sewer. Then he was able to go on his way.

The power that pulled Richard out of his predicament was not his own. It was from outside himself, but it made a difference in his life situation by giving him a new start. The fact that it made such a difference didn’t mean that he could claim to have saved himself in any way. So why should anyone entertain the notion that if we experience an initial transformation at conversion—not only for us, but also in us—we thereby attribute part of the ground of our salvation to our own works or merit? It is all pure grace, just as when God delivered the undeserving Israelites from Egypt.

We have been in such a deep rut or, to change metaphors, afflicted by such a tenaciously chronic disease, that we need a whole package of assistance. Paul speaks of the dynamic, interlinked set of remedies that change believers at conversion: “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11).

King David also included moral “washing” when he cried out for divine mercy and forgiveness at the time of his re-conversion: “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (Ps. 51:2). Additionally, he asked for something new to replace the old evil within him: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (vs. 10).

The word for “create” here is the same word used in Genesis 1 for God’s initial creation of the world. This term always has God as its subject because only He can create ex nihilo. So David called on the power that created the world to re-create his moral nature as part of the process of forgiveness/justification. The idea that spiritual conversion involves a divine act of creation should occasion no surprise because we already knew from Exodus 31 that the Sabbath links these concepts: The sign of creation is also the sign of sanctification (vss. 13, 17), which includes the transformation of initial consecration at conversion.

Ongoing Sanctification
In Exodus 31:13, “sanctify you” refers to the Israelites. It emphasizes that the Lord is the people’s ongoing sanctifier. The fact that the Source of sanctification is outside humanity means that even if people lose holiness, as they did at the Fall into sin and the golden calf apostasy, it can be restored by the always-holy God.

Because sanctification is an ongoing process, the initial event of transfer/transformation to holiness provides opportunity for the journey; it doesn’t immediately rocket one to the final destination. After my father-in-law Richard was back on the road in Hankow, he could have jumped back in the sewer if he had chosen to repeat the vicious cycle. But now he had a choice, whereas he didn’t have one before. He still had some cleaning up to do and had a ways to go, but he could get there by increments rather than wallowing in excrement.

Similarly, the Israelites’ “conversion” to holiness was the beginning of a journey with the holy God, who was sanctifying them by progressively drawing them closer to Himself. They made a commitment to do all that the Lord said, but they needed to learn how to obey Him and keep His covenant, to be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. It was a steep learning curve, a bumpy road. Tragically, the first generation of liberated Israelites ultimately failed to enter the rest prepared for them in the Promised Land because they faithlessly rejected the lordship of their Savior and Creator.

The Israelites strode forth to freedom with gifts (Ex. 11:2, 3), and so do Christians. But God has taken the risk of leaving our freedom of choice intact so that we can choose to love Him. So we can also choose to turn against Him and abuse His gifts, just as the Israelites used theirs to fabricate the golden calf.

Hebrews 4 picks up the appeal of Psalm 95 to hear the Lord’s voice and enter His rest. Here the weekly Sabbath (vs. 4) symbolizes a total life experience that God’s people can enjoy with Him through faith. The Sabbath, commemorating the Creator’s rest, is a microcosm of the life of faith that points beyond itself to rest in the re-created Promised Land to be enjoyed by those who maintain loyalty to Him. The fact that the literal Sabbath can represent a simultaneous experience, rather than being superseded by it, is confirmed by Exodus 31:13, where Sabbath is the sign that the Lord sanctifies His people. Those who claim that literal Sabbath rest is superseded by the Christian “rest” experience that involves all days of the week miss the point. Sabbath has never been a temporary type because it was instituted before the Fall—before the need for temporary types arose as part of God’s salvific plan.

The Israelites’ deliverance gave them the opportunity for intimacy with God, through which they could learn to be like the Creator in character by living in harmony with His principles, which are all based on unselfish love. Thus, at the beginning of Leviticus 19, He commanded the Israelites through Moses: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God” (vss. 2, 3). This remarkable chapter teaches God’s people how to emulate divine holiness by following a variety of instructions for safeguarding relationships with Him and their fellow creatures. At the center of the chapter is the command: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (vs. 18). Jesus cited this verse
and Deuteronomy 6:5 when He stated that all the law and the prophets hang on love for God and other human beings (Matt. 22:37-40).

So the dimension in which humans are to emulate God’s holiness is that of their relational interactions, by loving Him and others in harmony with His essential moral character of love. Therefore, sanctification as growth in holiness is growth in God’s kind of love: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (1 Thess. 3:12, 13). Here sanctification carries special force in view of Christ’s second coming, just as Sabbath rest, which signifies sanctification in Exodus 31:13, points to ultimate rest in Hebrews 4.

As the appropriately ongoing sign of the ongoing sanctification process, Sabbath celebrates growth in love, by which we are being restored into the moral image of God, who lovingly created, liberates, and re-creates. This helps to explain the connection in Isaiah 58 between Sabbath (here especially the Day of Atonement Sabbath) and social concern: Sabbath as a celebration of love and liberation calls for service to the needy, in diametric opposition to selfish oppression.

Holiness for Everyone

In “sanctify you” (Ex. 31:13), the you is plural, referring to all Israelites. Just as the Sabbath was equally for everyone, holiness signified by rest on this day was for the entire “holy nation,” rather than restricted to an elite group. The people as a whole were consecrated as a “priestly kingdom” when Moses sprinkled the blood of the covenant on them, just as blood of the ordination sacrifice was later applied to the bodies of the Aaronic priests, who functioned as the Lord’s special house-servants. The holiness of all Israelites was emphasized by the fact that any man or woman could take a temporary vow of Nazarite dedication to God. “Nazariteship” involved aspects of lifestyle similar to those of the Aaronic priests, especially the high priest.

Even Israelite criminal law reflected the concept that all Israelites were holy. In Leviticus 24:19, 20, one who inflicted a permanent injury on another person was to be punished by the law of retaliation, reflected in an eye-for-an-eye response. Elsewhere the same word for “permanent injury” refers to blemishes that disqualified priests from officiating and animals from serving as sacrifices. Sacrifices and priests were, as much as possible in a fallen world, to model the pristine, holy sphere of the Creator of perfect life. By implication, assault resulting in permanent injury diminished the wholeness, and therefore holiness, of a person made in the image of God. This kind of holiness actually applies to the entire human race, not just to Israel. God created everyone holy in the beginning, but all have fallen short of His glory (Rom. 3:23), so all need His sanctifying re-creation, which the Sabbath represents.

The Israelite ritual system emphasized that holiness is characterized by life, as opposed to physical ritual impurity, which represented “the birth-death cycle that comprises mortality” resulting from sin. Persons and objects that were ritually impure, and therefore associated with mortality, were
to be separated from the holy sphere of God (e.g., Lev. 7:20, 21; Num. 5:1-4), the Giver and Sustainer of all life. In this light, the fact that God sanctifies His people implies that He restores their life, which He created in the beginning.

Just as Israel’s holiness was for everyone, Peter echoes Exodus 19:6 to tell Christians: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). So our priestly role, like that of ancient Israel, is to convey God’s revelation of Himself to the world.

When Peter says “you,” he does not single out an elite episcopate or sector of sacerdotalists. Rather, he continues addressing “the exiles of the Dispersion . . . who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood” (1 Peter 1:1, 2). All of these believers and all others are to serve a royal priesthood and holy nation function.

An elite cadre of earthly priests, in addition to Christ’s heavenly ministry, is conspicuously absent in the New Testament. The universal New Covenant community does not have an earthly priesthood; we are a priesthood. In this sense, the church does not have a ministry; it is a ministry. Since the Christian Church has no elite earthly priesthood, the pedigree and gender restrictions applying to the earthly Aaronic male priesthood under the elective covenant with the nation of Israel are irrelevant to Christian ministry. Of course, the “body of Christ” needs differentiated functions, but these are determined by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12).

What would happen if we were to take the priesthood of all believers more seriously? What would happen if we were to optimize our collective human resources by more closely tuning in to the Spirit’s leading in assignment of roles, rather than quenching the Spirit under the influence of elitist attitudes to ministry held by churches that do not follow the New Testament model of religious leadership? If we empower all our members by recognizing that they are various kinds of ministers, rather than restricting ministry to paid professional clergy, could we more effectively “proclaim the mighty acts of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light”? (1 Peter 2:9).

For the Israelites, the Sabbath signified initial and ongoing sanctification through divine intervention. This transfer/transformation to holiness involved liberation to God and a new life of progressive growth in holy love. So Sabbath celebrated liberation, life, and love from the Creator.

Since we too are a holy people, who are liberated to new life by the Passover Lamb, receive the gift of sanctification as growth in love, and honor the Creator, we too can claim Sabbath rest as the sign of our sanctification. Today, as in biblical times, the egalitarian, inclusive Sabbath expresses the fact that God consecrates all people belonging to His egalitarian, inclusive, holy, priestly community that is designed to take this “gospel of the kingdom” to “the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14, NASB).

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this article are quoted from the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible.


