

Are We Guardians of Truth or Seekers of Truth?

By Chris Blake

Of the many fundamental divisions in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, perhaps none is as practically meaningful as the difference between Guardians of Truth and Seekers of Truth.

Guardians serve God and fear him. Seekers serve God and enjoy him.

Guardians talk of historic truths. Seekers live out present truth.

Guardians emphasize performance. Seekers emphasize participation.

Guardians consider early Adventists guardians. Seekers consider early Adventists seekers.

Guardians interpret literally. Seekers recognize irony, audience, symbolism, and context.

Guardians believe the Church is an organization. Seekers believe the Church is a force.

Guardians defend the truth. Seekers feed on it.

doxy on campuses and church boards will lead to truth squads, legalism, creedalism, and members fleeing. Buying into their philosophy, we become hard and brittle and dated and narrow enough to fit easily upon the shelf on aisle 7.

The nature of truth, however, is that it cannot be possessed, because once it is *that* it can be sold or bartered or placed cautiously in a napkin or a safe-deposit box. Truth is not found on the commodities market. We cannot visit our truth portfolio. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) alongside "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4). We can't own the truth any more than we can own Jesus. The truth owns us. We abide in truth. The truth inhabits us. The truth immerses us.

Lamentably, modern society too often undervalues truth and honesty. If we are not committed to Truth as true north, spin doctors do their damnably effective work and our spiritual compasses spin continually. These doctors appear in the form of friends, parents, teachers, pastors, administrators, commentators, entertainers, and a thousand other insistent voices. Paul Tillich observes, "The passion for truth is silenced by answers which have the weight of undisputed authority."¹

The essence of Guardians of Truth (GOT) is the oft-heard maxim, "We have the truth." Truth and its offspring are treated as a quantifiable, objective package to be tightly gripped with both hands. *There, we have it.* Guardians propel in me the unnerving feeling that their efforts to ensure ortho-

Guardians believe everyone should learn from us. Seekers believe we can learn from everyone.

Guardians approach church as a citadel. Seekers approach church as a hospital.

Guardians talk. Seekers talk, too. They also listen.

Remembering the Great Disappointment, Guardians don't want to get it wrong again. Remembering Calvary, Seekers don't want to disappoint Jesus.

Guardians warn of a future Time of Trouble. Seekers warn of anything that is based in fear.

Guardians often point to glaciers. Seekers often point to galaxies.

Guardians cover their ears for purity. Seekers dance for joy (though not very well).

Truth is air rushing and water surging through our very lungs and vessels. We can experience air and water, but we cannot *have* them. We gulp them in and still seek them. In the long run, we all must breathe unborrowed air, six times a minute inhaling oxygenated fresh nourishment. Living water cannot be bottled.

Seekers of Truth could be SOT (“They are drunk with new wine,” from Acts 2), but are perhaps best characterized as SOUGHT (Seekers Of Undeniably Good, IHealthful Truth). The parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son involve Seekers. Matthew 25’s parable of the talents exalts creative Seeker risk taking; Seeker stories abound in the New Testament: Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the blind man of John 9, the centurion and his servant, Zacchaeus, Peter on the water, Paul in prison, Mary’s anointing, and scores more.

This distinction goes beyond political conservatives and liberals, for one discovers conservatives who are at heart Seekers and liberals who are in practice Guardians. On a philosophical level, the division reflects the current worldwide debate over the relative merits of safety versus freedom—evidenced in the United States of America’s Patriot Act—with eye-opening repercussions.

Guardians defer to tradition. Seekers refer to an untraditional carpenter.

Guardians stand for the status quo. Seekers stand for those on the margins (“guarding the edges”).

Guardians are immovable. Seekers are irrepressible.

To GOT, God is imminent. To SOUGHT, God is immanent.

Guardians seek conformity, affirmation, and predictability. Seekers guard hope, compassion, and vitality.

GOT assess effective evangelism as information transmission. SOUGHT assess effective evangelism as non-manipulative dialogue.

For Guardians, the gospel is validation. For Seekers, the gospel is freedom.

Admittedly, whether the construct is guardians and seekers, sheep and goats, wise and foolish, or sacred and secular, binary thinking runs risks. Nuances become hidden; the potential for misapplication escalates. Note: The intent of this catalogue of twenty-eight is to enlighten and even inspire.

Both GOT and SOUGHT camps harbor committed Christians. Both carry accumulated penchants, motivations, and aptitudes. And we can all find ourselves deep in the other camp depending on the issue or circumstance.

Still, we see differences emerge in myriad ways.

For GOT, the Christian life is mainly sin management. For SOUGHT, the Christian life is mainly inclusive friendships.

Guardians confuse tastes with morals. Seekers confuse saints with forgiven sinners.

Guardians define who is worthy to belong. Seekers refuse to allow others to define them outside the Church.

Guardians prescribe and proscribe. Seekers say “whosoever will.”

Guardians are quick to count decisions. Seekers aim at creating disciples.

To Guardians, it’s all about salvation. To Seekers, it’s all about love.

Guardians see life in terms of “us” and “them.” Knowing we’re all in this together, Seekers don’t view even Guardians as “them.”

Of course, epigrammatic generalizations can lead to arrogance, polarization, and hostility. At times. Seekers need to have glaciers pointed out and historic truths recalled. Balance is mandatory.

However, after thirty years as a Christian, I find myself asking of my fellow believers which fundamental question we live by: “Got Jesus on aisle 7?” or “Sought Jesus with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength?”

In the end, our choice of question will determine our church’s direction. Anne Mellor muses that Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is “a book about what happens when a man tries to have a baby without a woman.”² What title would describe a denomination’s attempts to have a redemptive existence without a Seeker vision?

All disciples of Jesus need to fashion a salutary life view that is based in reality, both seen and unseen. Within that reality we cannot own gifts of truth or life—they arrive from Another and return to Another—and this is the humbling Truth that sets us free.

Notes and References

1. Paul Tillich, *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), chapter 8.
2. Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (London: Methuen, 1988), 39.

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