

It may be difficult to believe, but it was not too long ago, that not all homes had indoor plumbing. During this time there was a woman who from England who was going to make a trip to Germany. She was registered to stay in a guest house owned by a local schoolmaster and his wife. The traveling woman was concerned about the availability of indoor plumbing. She wrote to the school master to inquire about the location of the “W.C” — or water-closet, the English expression for indoor bathroom.

When the German schoolmaster received the letter he did not know the meaning of W. C. The school master then turned to the local minister to ask him the meaning of W. C., since the minister knew a little more English. Together the two pondered the meaning of the letters W. C. Together they finally decided that W. C. must stand for Wayside Chapel. Apparently the two concluded that the soon visitor from England was religious and wanted to know the location of the nearest Wayside Chapel to the house. The schoolmaster wrote the following letter to the lady from England.

My Dear Madam:

I take great pleasure in informing you that the W. C. is situated nine miles from the house in the center of a beautiful grove of pine trees surrounded by lovely grounds.

It is capable of holding 250 people, and is open on Sundays and Thursdays, only. As there are a great number of people expected during the summer months, I suggest you come early, although there is usually plenty of standing room. This is an unfortunate situation, especially if you are in the habit of going regularly. It may be of some interest to you to know that my daughter was married in the W. C. and it was there that she met her husband.

You will be glad to hear that a good number of people bring their lunch and make a day of it, while others wait until the last minute and arrive just on time. I would especially recommend that you go on Thursdays when there is music being played. The acoustics are excellent, and even the most delicate sounds can be heard everywhere.

The newest addition is a bell, which rings every time a person enters. A bazar is to be held to provide plush seats for all, since the people feel the current seats are uncomfortable. My wife has been ill, and so she hasn't been able to attend recently. It has been a year since she last went, which naturally pains her very much.

I shall be delighted to reserve a seat for you.

With kindest regards,
The Schoolmaster.

Obviously these people were not communicating very well. Since the church is about the word and a message, communicating is very important. Communication is important here in a local church family. Communication is important among sister churches in a conference. And our communication as a church to the world is vitally important.

One of the ways that we, corporately, as a church have decided to communicate with the world and with other churches is through a listing of beliefs known as the Fundamental Beliefs. Each week I preach I am aware that in some way I am talking about one of the

fundamental beliefs. But through time, on occasion, I am going to look at all 27 in a very systematic way.

Before we just head into the first belief on the Word of God I want to give some historical perspective. It was not until the 1872 that a pseudo-authoritative set of “Fundamental Principles” was published. The opening paragraph is very instructive. It reads —

“In presenting to the public this synopsis of our faith, we wish to have it distinctly understood that we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline, aside from the Bible. We do not put forth this as having authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them, as a system of faith, but is a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them. We often find it necessary to meet inquiries on this subject, and sometimes to correct false statements circulated against us, and to remove erroneous impressions which have obtained with those who have not yet had an opportunity to become acquainted with our faith and practice. Our only objective is to meet this necessity.”

What follows in this pamphlet are 25 very distinct beliefs, each marked off by a roman numeral. In many ways, it is just like the list of beliefs that we recognize today, both in content and in form.

In making presentations concerning the doctrines or the fundamental beliefs of the church I have a fear. I fear that the knowledge of the beliefs will form a stick, or a club in the hands of some which will be used to beat people into uniformity. Uriah Smith, who wrote the opening paragraph in the 1872 pamphlet was very quick to state this synopsis of our faith was not designed to secure uniformity among the people of the church.

Ideally, doctrines are statements of belief which should be used, as Uriah Smith said —

- To inform the greater public of the of the unanimity of belief, not the uniformity of belief which exists in the church,
- To remove false impressions concerning our teachings,

And I would hasten to add —

- Thirdly, to make a presentation which will help the individual member of the church or Christian visitor make informed study and decisions based on the word of God,
- And fourthly, discover Jesus in the center of each doctrine.

For your historical knowledge a more formal set of “Fundamental Principles” was published in the SDA Yearbook of 1889. Twenty well-defined teachings were printed. The then General Conference President Ole Olsen, had this to say in relation to the new list of beliefs —

“It will require much grace and wisdom to prevent division and discord.”

Elder Olsen, at the time understood the dynamic which can go on when doctrines are written and discussed. Instead of people using grace and wisdom with each other, division and discord sometimes become the rule.

I trust the Christianity and grace giving of the people of this congregation so that I do feel comfortable making presentations concerning the Fundamental Beliefs. But grace and wisdom must rule the day.

To continue our quick historical prologue the Principles were not revised until 1931. In 1931 the world church agreed upon 22 beliefs which would speak for our positions of belief of the Scriptures.

And finally in 1980, at the General Conference Session in Dallas, Texas, the latest revision, with 27 Fundamental Beliefs was agreed to by the church. In the document which came out of Dallas, we had for the first time a formal Preamble to the beliefs.

Let me read this preamble for you.

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.

This preamble states what had always been understood. It is great to hear the expectation that we believe the Spirit is going to lead us into a better understanding of Scripture.

When we think of Principles of Faith or doctrines we cannot be thinking cement. Doctrines are a snap-shot of a point in time where the church can agree upon certain language which expresses our faith as best as possible. In the future, should time last, another snap shot will be needed to better express the ideas of Scripture as understood by the people of the church at that point in time. Doctrines express unanimity, not uniformity. Doctrines express consensus, not conformity.

In the current listing of Fundamental Beliefs there is a logic to their presentation. It can best be stated like this:

- The Doctrine of God — Beliefs 1-5
- The Doctrine of Man — Beliefs 6, 7
- The Doctrine of Salvation — Beliefs 8, 9, 10
- The Doctrine of the Church — Beliefs 11-17
- The Doctrine of the Christian Life — Beliefs 18-22
- The Doctrine on Last Things — Beliefs 23-27

Today we are going to start at the beginning and look at belief #1 — The Word of God. Let me read the Fundamental Belief for you.

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard

of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history.

This statement of belief in the Word of God is actually a very rare belief in our world. First, many people do not believe humans need salvation. Others do not believe in God, and others, if they do believe there is a god, do not believe he communicates with humanity. Even in the Christian world a thorough belief in the Bible is rare. Many rank tradition and experience on par with the authority of Scripture. These are questions for another time. I am simply going to assume, in this setting, that we can claim God communicates with humans, and the focus of that communication is through the Bible.

The Bible recognizes that God has communicated with mankind through two [2] basic methods: General Revelation and Special Revelation.

General Revelation is a phrase given to describe God's communication with us through the creation — or what has been termed — God's second book — nature.

One of the clearest statements concerning General Revelation comes from Paul in Romans 1:20, 21. Paul wrote

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Paul is letting us know that the creation can be looked at and we can know that God exists and that He is very powerful. This is a "general"; a very non-specific message.

You and I can go outside on a star filled night and look at the awesome display of majesty, and know that there is a great and powerful God. We can be driven to our knees to worship in awe of the power at work, and know that God is a god of order and strength. But there is a problem. That same sky we look into is a sky which can bring storm clouds which kill. The ground we stand upon can shake and destroy. The same creation which can be so beautiful can also display chaos. In other words, the creation, nature, gives a mixed message. The creation can teach about God, but the message is stunted; the message is imperfect.

This is why we need a specific message from God. This is why we need more particular information about God so that we not only know about His attributes but also about His character and His intentions toward us. We believe this has happened by the words of the Bible or Special Revelation. Let us look at a text concerning Special Revelation. Let us read Hebrews 1:1, 2.

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways

2 in these last days has spoken to us in *His* Son, . . .

The writer to Hebrews informs us that God has been speaking throughout time. God has

used the prophets to speak. And the writer goes on to make the admission that now God's Son has spoken. God has revealed Himself through the words of the prophets and the words and ministry of Jesus.

This is why the Beloved Apostle will say of Jesus that He is the "Word who was made flesh." Jesus is the ultimate communicator between God and Mankind. Jesus will say to Philip, who wants to see and understand the Father, that if we see and hear Jesus we have seen the Father.

Thus, special revelation is the acknowledgment that God has taken the initiative to speak with humans in a very specific way. This communication is done through the words of the prophets and the words of Jesus — this is the Bible.

The question I now want to examine is the "how" — how did God put His words into the prophets? Let us see what Paul the apostle had to say to Timothy — 2 Timothy 3.

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;
17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Paul informs us that the Scripture is "inspired". The word "inspired" is a translation of a word only found once in all of Greek literature. It appears it was a word Paul invented. The word translated as "inspired" is pronounced THEOPNEUSTOS. This is a compound word — Theo is the word for God and Pneustos describes the act of breathing. Paul is literally saying that all Scripture is "God-breathed". The idea I want to take from this text for now is that the formation of the Scripture is an act initiated by God. In other words, Scripture is not a human invention. God, through the power of the Holy Spirit acted upon individuals. He gave them a message, and they in turn, communicated that message to the community of faith.

Let us look at a passage which places value upon the Scriptures. In Luke 24 we have the story of two men walking on the road to Emmaus — it is the day of the resurrection. As they walk along Jesus walks with the two. In the conversation that follows the men began to explain to Jesus the events which had occurred in Jerusalem over the past three days. They told Jesus that some were even claiming that Jesus was now alive. But the two walking did not believe the report. It is at that point that Jesus interrupts, and we get these words from Luke 24:25-27.

25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!
26 "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"
27 And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Let us be clear about the context — Jesus is risen. He has been to the grave and back. His mortal flesh has put on immortality. Jesus is no longer confined or restrained. Jesus could give the two men any message He wants. He could give them a new revelation of new information. But what does Luke tell us — "And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

Jesus does not give a new revelation, nor does He give new information. Jesus goes back to the same Scriptures — which the writer from Hebrew affirms that God spoke through — and begins to teach from them.

In the power and in the moment of the resurrection Jesus did not see fit to give some new, grand, information. But Jesus went to the same Scriptures that you and I read from today. Jesus believed God has spoken and communicated with us in a very special way through the Bible.

If there was ever a time, if there was ever an event that should teach us about the value and the ability of God to be able to communicate effectively with us through the Bible — this story is it. The resurrected Jesus believed in the effectiveness of the Scriptures as the Word of God to communicate the message of salvation to us.

As a pastor I have the task and the responsibility to study more than most people. In reading I learn that many who study the and write about the Bible are not themselves believers. But for them the study of God's Word is simply and academic exercise. Scripture is studied as one might study the writings of Plato, the essays of Henry David Thoreau, or the poems of Walt Whitman. But let us look at one more text and try to discover the purpose of God's communication to us. Romans 10:17

So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Above and beyond any book ever written the Bible is a book written with the clear intent of building faith in God. When Jesus gave His Bible study to the two men on the road to Emmaus it was not an academic exercise. Jesus was trying to persuade the two, through the study of the word, that what God had said about the Christ was true, and they should believe in Jesus for their salvation.

The proclamation and the study of God's word is to be held in high regard. It is the chief manner in which God communicates His message of hope and victory to us. The intent of Scripture is clear and decisive — God wants us to believe in Jesus.

I encourage you to study the word with fervency. Study it alone. Study it in groups, but study. This is the way God communicates to us.