

Fundamental Principles

For nearly a decade following 1844, Adventists were happy to simply say, as did other Reformers before them, that they believed in the Bible and the Bible only as their rule of faith and practice.

But as their study of the Bible uncovered new truths, there came some need to clearly identify and list them. Years later Ellen White recalled their work of searching “for the truth as for hidden treasure. I met with the brethren, and we studied and prayed earnestly. Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night... Thus light was given that helped us to understand the Scriptures in regard to Christ, his mission, and his priesthood.” *Review and Herald*, May 25, 1905 par. 24.

She then concluded: “A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction that the Lord had given me.” *Ibid*

As her husband began the publishing work, James listed in the July 9, 1851 issue of the *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* the essential understanding of heavenly things that the Advent Faith had formed by a literal reading of the Bible. “Our position is, that a change has taken place in the position and work of our literal High Priest in **the literal Sanctuary in heaven**... We not only believe in **a literal Jesus**, who is a “Minister of the Sanctuary,” but we also believe that **the Sanctuary is literal**... We therefore believe that **both are literal**... If we take the liberty to say there is not **a literal Ark**, containing the ten commandments in heaven, we may go only a step further and deny **the literal City**, and **the literal Son of God**. Certainly, Adventists should not choose the spiritual view, rather than the one we have presented. We see no middle ground to be taken.”

Probably the earliest printed statement of beliefs occurred in 1853 in response to a request by the Seventh-day Baptists. In the August 11 issue of the *Review and Herald*, James summarized,

feelings are lost. We are united in these great subjects: Christ's immediate, personal second Advent, and the observance of all of the commandments of God, and the faith of his Son Jesus Christ, as necessary to a readiness for his Advent.

With Seventh-day Baptists, we agree in the institution, design and perpetuity of the Sabbath. Though

One year later, James White began including a brief list of “doctrines” under the publication’s masthead.

The Bible, the Law of God, the personal pre-millennial advent of Christ, the post-millennial restoration of this Earth, Immortality at the resurrection.

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Leading Doctrines Taught by the Review.

*The Bible, and the Bible alone, the rule of faith and duty.
The Law of God, as taught in the Old and New Testaments,
unchangeable.*

*The Personal Advent of Christ and the Resurrection of the
Just, before the Millennium.*

*The Earth restored to its Eden perfection and glory, the final
Inheritance of the Saints.*

*Immortality alone through Christ, to be given to the Saints
at the Resurrection.*

That was all.

Surprisingly, the list did not specifically include the Sabbath though this would, of course, be included in the Law of God. And what about the heavenly sanctuary? This was certainly an important and distinctive Adventist teaching. No mention either of baptism by immersion, tithing or Christian conduct. Did they not yet know of these important truths?

The ultimate reductionist response could be that the Bible and the Bible only as our “rule of faith and duty” covers everything! There was a general feeling that any formal listing of specific beliefs would smack of a creed, just the thing that had caused the other churches to become stuck in their advancement of truth. A creed was to be avoided at all cost!

Seven years later, when they were ready to formally organize, James White urged that the newly formed Seventh-day Adventist church adopt not a creed but a simple “Church Covenant” based on Revelation 14:12. It was recorded in the October 8, 1861 *Review and Herald*.

Resolved, That this Conference recommend the following church covenant: We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ. Seconded by Bro. Hull. Adopted.

This was all that was needed by those giving the three angels messages.

A Literal Understanding

William Miller had established in his Rules of Interpretation the practice of reading the Bible first in its plain, literal meaning, unless an illogical or unreasonable understanding would indicate a figurative, symbolic meaning should be understood. James White continued to apply this rule.

“As the great offering for the world, made on **Calvary was literal**, and as **our great High Priest, Jesus, the son of God, is a real and literal personage**, so must he have a **literal sanctuary in heaven**, in which to perform his priestly office.” *Review and Herald*, August 18, 1863 92.5

The person of the Father, the personality of the Son, the heavenly Sanctuary were key doctrines of critical importance to the fledgling Adventist church. Writing in the *Review and Herald* of Oct 31, 1865, R. F. Cottrell also defended the literal reading of Scripture:

“The object of lifting up the brazen serpent in the wilderness was not to relieve the pains and give ease and comfort to those who had been bitten, though doubtless it had this effect. But the great leading object was to prolong their lives. It saved them from **perishing literally**, and gave them **literal life**. So Christ died that the believers in him should not perish—**literally perish**, or die to live no more—but have eternal life. If this does not mean what it says, **by what rule of interpretation shall we understand the Scriptures?** I know that words are often used figuratively, always deriving their force from the literal idea. But **shall we take the exception for the rule, and because words are sometimes used figuratively, say they have no literal meaning?** Again, Paul, speaking of **the literal death of Christ** and of **the literal resurrection** of those who sleep in him, at the time when the “Lord himself” shall descend from Heaven, sets forth the object of Christ’s death as follows: “Who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.” 1 Thess. v, 10. Is not this **the literal death of Christ**, and the **literal living of the saints** with him, by **literal resurrection** of the dead? Did not the Son of God give his life for ours?”

The Adventists saw the effects of spiritualizing away the truths of the Bible and the doctrines resulting from this practice. They sought to build a firm foundation of scriptural truth based on a plain reading of the Word of God.

“In a representation which passed before me, I saw a certain work being done by medical missionary workers. Our ministering brethren were looking on, watching what was being done, but they did not seem to understand. **The foundation of our faith**, which was established by so much prayer, such earnest searching of the Scriptures, was being taken down, pillar by pillar. Our faith was to have nothing to rest upon—the **sanctuary** was gone, **the atonement** was gone.” Manuscript 46, May 18, 1904.

“Those who seek to remove the old landmarks are not holding fast; they are not remembering how they have received and heard. Those who try to bring in theories that would remove **the pillars of our faith concerning the sanctuary or concerning the personality of God or of Christ**, are working as blind men. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the people of God adrift without an anchor.” *Manuscript Release* 760 9.5

Now let’s examine those original pillars of our faith that were forged into the immovable foundation by so much prayer and earnest searching of the Scriptures.

Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-Day-Adventists

This 14 page pamphlet was printed in 1872 by the Battle Creek Adventist Steam Press. The text, rich with scriptural allusions, was later published in the very first issue of the new west coast *Signs of the Times* magazine on June 4, 1874 page 3.

1. That there is one God, a personal, spiritual being, the creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal, infinite in wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and mercy; unchangeable, and everywhere present by his representative, the Holy Spirit. Ps. 139 : 7.

1Cor 8:6, 1Tim 2:5, 1Thes 1:9, Deut 6:4, James 2:19, Mark 12:32, Eph 3:9, Exo 34:6, Mal 3:6, Rom 8:9, Matt 10:20.

2. That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom God created all things, and by whom they do consist; that he took on him the nature of the seed of Abraham for the redemption of our fallen race; that he dwelt among men, full of grace and truth, lived our example, died our sacrifice, was raised for our justification, ascended on high to be our only mediator in the sanctuary in Heaven, where, with his own blood he makes atonement for our sins; which atonement, so far from being made on the cross, which was but the offering of the sacrifice, is the very last portion of his work as priest, according to the example of the Levitical priesthood, which foreshadowed and prefigured the ministry of our Lord in Heaven. See Lev. 16 ; Heb. 8 : 4, 5 ; 9: 6, 7; &c.

Again, 1Cor 8:6, Eph 4:5, 2 John 1:3, Eph 3:9, Heb 1:2, Col 1:16

Heb 2:16
John 1:14
Rom 5:10
Rom 4:25, Eph 4:8
1Tim 2:5, Heb 8:1
Acts 20:28, Heb 13:12,
Rev 1:5, 1Pet 1:18-20,

3. That the Holy Scriptures, of the Old and New Testaments, were given by inspiration of God, contain a full revelation of his will to man, and are the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

2Tim 3:16

An extensive introduction stated that Adventists had no creed aside from the Bible and that, while the list was not being promoted "as having any authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them," it was simply "a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them." The brief statement detailed 25 points

1. There is one God, everywhere present by his Holy Spirit
2. There is one Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Eternal Father
3. The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are inspired of God
4. Baptism by immersion commemorates the resurrection of Jesus
5. The new birth is spiritual conversion now,
and physical immortality at the advent
6. Prophecy, as part of God's Word, can be understood (overlaps 3)
7. World History is outlined in Bible Prophecy (overlaps 6)
8. Second Advent is pre-millennial
9. 1844 terminates the 2300 year prophecy of Daniel 8:14
and begins the sanctuary cleansing
10. Sanctuary in heaven is detailed in Hebrews 8,
Christ, our High Priest, is now in the most holy
11. Ten Commandments are immutable
and perpetually binding on all men for all time
12. Fourth Commandment identifies the seventh day as the Bible Sabbath
(overlaps 11)
13. Papacy has thought to change times and laws in fulfillment of prophecy
and changed the Sabbath to Sunday (overlaps 6)
14. The Holy Spirit works repentance, regeneration and conversion
in our lives (overlaps 5)
15. We are dependent on Christ for justification
and grace to obey his holy law (overlaps 14)
16. The Spirit of God helps us understand the inspired Word,
convince of sin, and transform us
17. Three Angels messages announce the second advent of Christ
18. The investigative judgment occurs during the cleansing of the sanctuary
(overlaps 10)
19. Death in the grave is a sleep of inactivity
20. State of the dead is unconsciousness (overlaps 19)
21. Two resurrections: righteous at Christ's coming,
wicked after the millennium
22. Resurrection occurs at the last trump of the second advent (overlaps 21)
23. During millennium the saints are in heaven, the earth desolate
24. End of millennium, New Jerusalem returns to earth,
wicked raised and destroyed (like 23)
25. New heaven and new earth created (overlaps 24)

We can clearly identify some redundancy. Eliminating these duplicates would reduce the number to 14 Fundamental Principles. Today the church has managed to define 28. And there are dramatic changes not simply in number but substance.

Progressive Truth that Changed

The original published Fundamental Principles remained virtually static for nearly 60 years (1872 to 1931). But soon after Leroy Froom became the Ministerial Director of the General Conference in 1926, he published a series of articles promoting a new Bible translation, the American Revised Version (Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia). W.W. Prescott at the 1919 Bible Conference had previously done the same. Besides the *Ministry* magazine, they also appeared in the *Signs of the Times* beginning in 1928.

In his book *Movement of Destiny*, Froom indicates that the time had come two years later for a new statement of beliefs. Edson Rogers, the General Conference statistician since 1903 responsible for publishing the *Yearbook*, “was distressed over the fact that, **because of differences**, for a number of years there had been no statement of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs, or Faith, in our *Yearbook*.” (L.E.Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, p. 410, emphasis supplied). “The time had come, he felt, for a suitable Statement of Faith to appear in our *Yearbook*. This, he thought, **now to be possible**.” (*Ibid*, p. 418, emphasis supplied).

Why was it finally possible in 1930 to write a new “suitable” statement of Fundamentals? Why was it “now possible” to promote a new version of the Bible to replace the Authorized Version of pioneer Seventh-day Adventists? Froom explained why on page 17 of his book. “Elder Daniells,” the GC president for 22 years, “recognized the serious problems involved. He knew that time would be required for certain theological wounds to heal, and for attitudes to modify on the part of some...Possibly it would be necessary to wait **until certain individuals had dropped out of action**.”

With the passing of Uriah Smith in 1903, Daniel Bourdeau in 1905, Ellen White in 1915, E.J. Waggoner and Dr. David Paulson the following year, Stephen Haskell in 1922 and A.T. Jones in 1923, and J.N. Loughborough in 1924, the General Conference Executive Committee could state without fear of objection in 1926, “We recognize every agency that lifts up Christ before man as a part of the divine plan for the evangelization of the world, and we hold in high esteem the Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ.” (“Relations to Other Societies,” GC Exec. Committee, 1926).

The need to be accepted by “other communions”, to receive “the right arm of fellowship” by the evangelicals, to be welcomed into “the sisterhood of churches” required that changes be made in our statements of belief. The Fundamental Principles that we had published from 1874 to 1914 were not “suitable” because of our position on

1. The Final Atonement in Heaven
2. The Human Nature of Christ after 4000 years of degradation
3. The Place of Scripture and Prophecy in the Church, and
4. The Doctrine of the Trinity

The Final Atonement in Heaven

Our experience in 1844 led to a study of the heavenly sanctuary and its services. Leviticus 16 was especially examined in the context of Daniel 8:14 and the cleansing of the sanctuary on the antitypical day of atonement. This resulted in our understanding of the pre-advent investigative judgment depicted in Daniel 7 and illustrated by the parable of the wedding garment in Matthew 22. We recognized the imperative of the First Angel's Message in Revelation 14:7 that it was now the hour of God's Judgment and a call to accept His everlasting gospel, to worship the Creator on the day honoring His great acts of creation and redemption, must go to the world. This was our commission as the remnant seed of the woman, that "His people" might come out of that other woman, on whose forehead was written "MYSTERY, BABYLON" and among whose daughters were precious souls to be reached with the final message of mercy.

But the mother of harlots and her daughters had rejected the call, had ignored the movement of Jesus into the most holy place to begin his final intercession, dispensing His Spirit, writing His law in our minds, and His Father's name on our foreheads to seal us to Himself. They had discovered the cross and made it the end of Christ's redeeming work. There could be no "compatibility" as long as we held on to the first Angel's message.

The Human Nature of Christ After the Fall

The Evangelical World, like the Catholic Church, imagined a need to protect and insulate Christ from sin by declaring Him not only sinless in His divine nature, but sinless in His human nature as well. The Catholics accomplished this by pronouncing Mary, His mother, immaculately conceived without sin herself! The Evangelicals declared our Saviour born with the nature of Adam before the fall. Both solutions rendered the Son of God impervious to sin, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" Heb 7:26. No longer an example for us of how the Spirit of God dwelling in us as it did in Him can make us "more than conquerors" Rom 8: and "overcome as [He] has overcome" Rev 3:21, but merely a substitute only.

Without the hope of victory over sin, mankind is destined to an endless round of failure and forgiveness, committing and confessing. "Sinning until Jesus comes" must be simply accepted, because the power of God to bring us victory over sin is just not possible, they claim. But, "thanks be to God who has given us the victory" and this is our victory that we believe in the only begotten Son of God, who lives in us by His Spirit, to not only "forgive us our sins, but cleanse us from all unrighteousness" 1John 1:9.

Scripture and Prophecy in the Church

The original Fundamental Principle from 1872 to 1914 (and not replaced until 1980) stated,

19. "...the Spirit of God was promised to manifest itself in the church through certain gifts, enumerated in I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4; that these gifts are not designated to supersede, or to take the place of the Bible, which is sufficient to make us wise unto salvation, any more than the Bible can take the place of the Holy Spirit..."

In 1980 this all changed. Now the Fundamental Belief states,

"One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth and provide of the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."

The explicit statement in 1872 that the Spirit of Prophecy gift was "not designated to supersede, or to take the place of the Bible" has now disappeared, and additional language added to elevate "her writings" to the level equal with the Bible as "a continuing and authoritative source of truth," making them an equal authority with the Bible, just as the Mormon Church has done with their Book of Mormon. Ellen White herself stated,

"God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ***Thus saith the Lord***' in its support." Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, Page 595. (emphasis supplied).

"The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union, all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible. Instead of wrangling with one another, let men exalt the Lord. Let us meet all opposition as did our Master, saying, "It is written." Let us lift up the banner on which is scribed, The Bible our rule of faith and discipline." Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 416

The Trinity

As Ellen White never employed the terms trinity, triune, co-eternal, or consubstantial in all her published writings comprising 50,000 pages and 23 million words, the Fundamental Principles from 1872 to 1914 avoided such language as well. As we have already noted, the first two Principles stayed close to the words of Scripture. This was supported by Ellen White.

“God is the Father of Christ; Christ is the Son of God” *Testimonies to the Church* vol. 8 p. 268

“From eternity there was a complete unity between the Father and the Son. **They were two, yet little short of being identical**; two in individuality, yet one in spirit, and heart, and character.” *Youth Instructor*, Dec 16, 1897

“The Sovereign of the universe was not alone in His work of beneficence. He had **an associate—a co-worker** who could appreciate His purposes, and could share His joy in giving happiness to created beings.” *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 34

“Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father—one in nature, in character, in purpose—**the only being in all the universe** that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God.” *Great Controversy* p. 493.1

The word Trinity was slipped into an abbreviated list of beliefs by F.M. Wilcox, then editor of the *Review in Herald*, in its October 9, 1913 issue buried within an article written by him with the title “The Message for Today.” Notice who the first spiritual being is.

converted in a day.

The Saviour longs to manifest his grace and stamp his character on the whole world. It is his purchased possession, and he desires to make men free, and pure, and holy. Though Satan works to hinder this purpose, yet through the blood shed for the world there are triumphs to be achieved that will bring glory to God and the Lamb. Christ will not be satisfied till the victory is complete, and “he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”

MRS. E. G. WHITE.



The Message for Today

THE Christian church has passed through many crises in its history. Through the ages it has stood as the conservator of the

For the benefit of those who may desire to know more particularly the cardinal features of the faith held by this denomination, we shall state that Seventh-day Adventists believe,—

1. In the divine Trinity. This Trinity consists of the eternal Father, a personal, spiritual being, omnipotent, omniscient, infinite in power, wisdom, and love; of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the eternal Father, through whom all things were created, and through whom the salvation of the redeemed hosts will be accomplished; the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, the one regenerating agency in the work of redemption.

2. That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by the inspiration of God, and contain a full

This “Trinity” consists of the eternal Father, the Son of the eternal Father, and the regenerating agency, the Holy Spirit, the third person.

The Father is described by Wilcox as a personal, spiritual being Himself. This is not orthodox Trinitarianism which would say the Father was a person within the being of God; one of three persons in the one God, who is only one being. Wilcox has instead continued to support the original pioneer belief in the separate, individual beings of the Father and the Son, the only other being in all the universe who could enter into the Father's counsels.

But this was a first step in the direction of a Trinitarian posture for the church in its quest to be accepted by the sisterhood of churches, all of which, like their Mother, were Trinitarian.

The following year, the SDA Yearbook for 1914, again printed the original 1872 Fundamental Principles attributed to "the late Uriah Smith."

1914

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS.

By the late Uriah Smith.

Seventh-day Adventists have no creed but the Bible; but they hold to certain well-defined points of faith, for which they feel prepared to give a reason "to every man that asketh" them. The following propositions may be taken as a summary of the principal features of their religious faith, upon which there is, so far as is known, entire unanimity throughout the body. They believe:—

1. That there is one God, a personal, spiritual being, the Creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal; infinite in wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and mercy; unchangeable, and everywhere present by his representative, the Holy Spirit. Ps. 139: 7.

2. That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom he created all things, and by whom they do consist; that he took on him the nature of the seed of Abraham for

But because of "differences" neither list was published again until 1931. Ellen White had warned that this would happen.

"The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error. A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written. A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced." E.G. White, *Special Testimonies*, Series B (1905) no. 2

Today we have such a philosophical description of the "one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons...He is infinite..." We now call the three persons "He", for we dare not call "Him" *They* or we would be worshipping three gods. We have spiritualized away the Father and His Son into simply "roles," mere metaphors, far from the simple gospel of God and His only begotten Son.

Fundamentals

“...in spite of a very strong and consistent Adventist bias against creedalism, we find ourselves today with something that functions very much like a creed. Our present statement of Fundamental Beliefs can be, and indeed has been, misused.”
Fritz Guy, “Uncovering the Origins of the Statement of Twenty-seven Fundamental Beliefs”

“Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination’s Fundamental Beliefs.” George Knight, *Ministry*, October 1993

“Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support.” Ellen White, *Great Controversy*, p. 595