

**Institute for Christian Teaching**

**FAITH: A COMPARISON OF HUMANISTIC AND  
BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS IN RELATION TO  
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

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**Faith: A Comparison of Humanistic and Biblical Definitions in Relation to Christian  
Education<sup>1</sup>**

**By**

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In a quiet cobblestone roundabout in Constance, Germany, I was transfixed as I stood in front of a large commemorative boulder. The cobblestone roundabout gave way to landscaping that accentuated the memorial stone. On one side of the boulder was engraved the name John Huss, on the other side the name Jerome. Both were professors at the University of Prague in Bohemia. Their participation in the Protestant Reformation brought their teaching and preaching into question by the Church at Rome. They were therefore brought to trial before the Council of Constance (1414-18 A.D.).

Just prior to my visit to the commemorative boulder I had toured the home of their house arrest and had driven by the council chamber where they were tried and convicted as criminals for their allegiance to the Bible as the Word of God. I then visited a tower protruding out of Lake Constance where they might have been imprisoned in the basement the night before their execution. If so, they would have been standing waist deep in the glacial waters of the lake.

I stood deep in contemplation in front of this memorial boulder, the place of their execution. Ringing in my ears were the words of Ellen White, “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” (GC 595). What would it be like, I asked, to give one’s life, rather than to compromise the authority of the Bible?

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this paper were reworked from chapters 2 and 8 in my book, [The Certainty of the Second Coming](#). Copyright 2000 by Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD 21740.

After several minutes of meditation, I pulled out my camera to record the event. I had been so deep in meditation that I did not notice that an elderly lady was sitting on a park bench at the base of the boulder. The camera startled her. She stood up, circled the rock two or three times nervously glancing back and forth between the camera and the boulder, and finally, shaking her head in bewilderment, she took off down the street at what seemed like her top speed.

Imagining her as a young girl growing up in that city, living just several doors from the monument, I envisioned her playing hide and seek around the boulder, or playing ball with the boys on one of the quiet side streets adjoining it, or just sitting on the park bench next to it while resting in its shade. And yet, with all of this familiarity, she never grasped its significance—a commemoration of two lives snuffed out as they were burned at the stake for their allegiance to the Word of God.

### **The Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Authority of the Bible**

My thoughts shifted to our church. We inherited the emphasis of the Reformation, *sola scriptura* - - the Bible alone was our creed. This solid rock was in our back yard---we grew up with it, played around it, stood upon it. We sat on the bench beside it and rested in its shade. And yet, with all of this familiarity, did we truly understand its significance?

We were the people of the Book. We built upon it; we relied on it completely, for we were hammering out the doctrines of the Sabbath, the state of the dead, and the judgment. All Biblical doctrines relying upon the authority of the Bible. But we simply assumed its authority, for the foundational authority of the Bible was not the issue. The Bible was not in question. Our concern was to emphasize the Biblical doctrines which had been lost to the Christian church.

We came out of churches which already accepted the authority of the Bible, the Reformation call to *sola scriptura* (the Bible alone), just as they did righteousness by faith, *sola fide* (by faith alone). We assumed that the Bible was the sole foundational authority, and that salvation was by faith alone. Having assumed these foundational doctrines, we moved on to the task of restoring the rest of Biblical teaching. As a result, we did not grapple with the issues involved in these two doctrines and were therefore open to salvation by works and to human reason as the foundation of theology.

Our first crisis came with the doctrine of righteousness by faith. In 1888 we confronted the doctrine head on. What had been assumed now had to be spelled out clearly. This doctrine has been periodically renewed within the church. What a blessing it has been to the church and to each of us individually. We can be grateful for the many voices which have joined in the proclamation of salvation by grace through faith.

We now face a similar crisis on the authority of the Bible. Just as we became aware of the issues and principles involved in *sola fide*, so we must also become aware of the issues involved in the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. We can be grateful for the many voices in our church that are beginning to understand and proclaim the message that the Bible is the sole foundation of our faith and lives.

There are many similarities between the doctrines of *sola fide* and *sola scriptura*. Just as salvation is a gift, so the Bible, God's self-revelation, is also a gift. Just as salvation is not to be manipulated by human effort, so the Bible is not to be manipulated by human reason. Just as salvation is received by faith alone, so also the Bible is received by faith alone.

In the history of theology, when one principle is lost, the other is also eventually lost. For example, salvation is no longer a gift if the Bible is not also a gift. If the authority of Scripture

depends upon human works of reason, then the salvation of which the Bible speaks also depends upon those same human works.

### **Misunderstanding the Authority of the Bible**

As I have reflected on that moment of meditation by the Huss and Jerome memorial, I have realized that just as the woman sitting on the park bench missed the significance of the memorial stone, so in many ways, I have missed the significance of the authority of the Bible.

For example, unfortunately I have sought an absolute rock solid foundation to put under the Bible so I could accept it as the Word of God and therefore the only authority. I employed the power of science, archaeology, history, and philosophy to build a firm foundation so that I could conclude that the Bible is the absolute authority. I accepted the sole authority of the Bible because it was reasonable to do so, not realizing I had just made myself the absolute authority. I rested my case on the excellency of reason rather than on the power of the Word of God. My concept of faith was defined humanistically rather than Biblically.

Also I have misunderstood the authority of the Bible by seeking a “balanced” theology. I tried to balance law and grace, faith and reason, and natural revelation with special revelation. Somehow I overlooked the fact that what looked balanced to me might be altogether out of balance from God’s standpoint, and that it was the Biblical message and its balance that was important rather than what seemed in balance from my human perspective. Furthermore, some truths are not a question of balance, but a question of relationship. It is foolish for the housewife to argue with the architect of her new home over the balance between the kitchen and the foundation. That is a question of relationship. The kitchen must rest upon the foundation. So, the keeping of the law follows salvation by grace, reason rests upon Biblical faith, and natural revelation is understood within the context of special revelation.

I misunderstood Biblical authority when I wanted to find the “truth,” wherever it may be found, whether it is in nature, reason, science, philosophy, history, or elsewhere. I wanted to discover the truth so I could find my way to faith in God. The “truth” somehow had existence in the universe independent of God and His Word. Like Pilot, I asked, “What is truth?” (John 18:36) when the “Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6) stood directly before me! For me, truth was a thing or a concept by which everything, including God and His Word, were measured.

Also I failed to grasp the authority of the Bible when I took the “truths” discovered in the natural world and synthesized them with the truths in Scripture. Without realizing it, I was using a method that came from the major theologian of the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas. For him, theology was built upon the Bible *and* nature, the Bible *and* reason, the Bible *and* philosophy, the Bible *and* church tradition. In a sense, I was saying it is wiser to build my faith upon the rock *and* the sand.

I misunderstood the authority of the Bible when I saw it as one authority among others. I thought in terms of the *primacy* or the *supremacy* of the Bible rather than in terms of the *sole* foundational authority of the Bible. I was shocked when I discovered my position on the *primacy* of Scripture to be the pre-reformation view answered by the reformation with the principle, *sola scriptura*.

As a result I compromised the authority of the Bible by assuming the contemporary humanistic concept of freedom—that we are absolutely free in the universe to make our decision either for or against Christ from a neutral starting point. The Biblical teaching is that we are either slaves of Christ or slaves of Satan, and that we are set free only when we come to Christ.

Finally I misunderstood the authority of the Bible when I wanted to “meet people where they are” in order to bring them to Christ. I wanted to start with their worldview, with their philosophical framework in order to convince them of the truth of the Bible. This in effect made their culture the final authority. It is true that people must be approached in such a way that they can understand the gospel, but the conviction of faith must come from the Holy Spirit, not from the dictates of one’s own culture. Our task is to confront culture with God’s Word, rather than to base faith in God’s Word upon a particular culture.

In sum, without verbalizing it, I was doing God a favor. I was helping Him find His place in the outline of truth. I was trying to tell Him where He fits into the organization of knowledge. I knew exactly where an article about Him would be placed in the Encyclopedia. I was attempting to bring Him into the canon of truth. I wanted to build a castle on my own humanistic concept of faith, truth, and freedom so that God would have a proper place to live. How lucky God was that I was on the scene to pull together the best arguments to prove His existence and defend the Bible as His Word.

I was like the doctor who lays the patient out on the operating table. He examines the patient, anesthetizes it so that he can control it, breathes life into it, massages its heart, maps its brain waves, excises a portion of its organs for further examination by other specialists, diagnoses it, fixes its problem if possible, and finally pieces it back together as best he can.

I wanted to send the Bible to the hospital so that it could be diagnosed and fixed. I failed to recognize that the process is just the opposite—that I must be placed upon the table, submit to the control of the Word of God, be dissected by it, allow its power under the Holy Spirit to be breathed into me and be healed by it.

I was willing to say, “Lord, I submit my all to you--My heart, my will, my money, my time, my family, my house: But my intellect? Oh, I reserve that for myself. Please Lord; I have given you everything else! But I must remain autonomous in my intellect! How else can I have faith that is based upon the truth?”

### **The Reformation and the Authority of the Bible**

A major theme runs through The Great Controversy. Just as God’s people throughout the ages have upheld the twin truths of *sola fide* (salvation by faith alone), and *sola scriptura* (by the Bible alone), so God will have a people on earth at the end of time who will proclaim these truths over all other authorities, whether they be ecclesiastical, political, existential, or rational.

During the middle ages, just as salvation was conceived to be based upon faith *and* works, so the formula for theology was the Bible *and* church tradition, the Bible *and* nature, the Bible *and* reason, and the Bible *and* philosophy. While the *supremacy* or *primacy* of Scripture was upheld, it was placed alongside other “lesser” authorities. The net result was that the authority of the Bible was compromised.

The Reformation responded to this notion that the Bible was to be placed along side something else with the principle of *sola scriptura*. The Bible alone was the basis not only of theology, but of every aspect of our lives, including the foundation of our faith, intellect, freedom, and knowledge. The Bible was not to be accepted on humanistic grounds, but by faith under conviction of the Holy Spirit.

While the Reformation made the Bible the foundation of our faith and lives, it did not deny that God spoke through other channels such as the church or nature. However the Bible was the authority to determine when and where God had spoken elsewhere. Nor did the

Reformation deny that human reason had a significant role to play. *Reason was a legitimate tool for understanding when it operated from the foundation of the Bible.*

The Reformation's return to the authority of Scripture did not arise out of philosophical considerations. It came out of recognition of the Biblical claim to be the Word of God and out of a desire to submit to that Word.

### **Enlightenment Era and the Authority of the Bible**

Throughout history, Christians have succumbed to the temptation to re-interpret the Bible within the framework of their contemporary philosophy and culture. This process takes place by imposing contemporary thought patterns, definitions, and methods of interpretation on Scripture. The Bible is squeezed into the mold of the contemporary world so that the Biblical message becomes little more than a vehicle for protecting and promulgating the contemporary worldview. By means of this reinterpretation, the Bible is made to behave in harmony with the current worldview. Thus it is made acceptable to each new generation.

The Reformation was quickly followed by the era of enlightenment. This new era revolutionized the way humanity thought of itself. It brought with it new philosophies, new definitions, and new methods of interpretation. Mankind had come of age. Humanity was no longer under the tutelage of God, the church, the Bible, or any external universal. We were free to determine our own truth, to set our own sails, and to determine our own destiny. While the enlightenment era revolutionized our thinking, it also built upon humanistic tendencies present in prior philosophies. It brought humanism to its ultimate conclusion--the autonomy of humanity from any external norms. Though a reaction to the enlightenment, the postmodern era in which we now live is also in some ways the by product of the enlightenment era principles of autonomy from any external (and now internal) structures.

Since the humanistic approach is quite influential in our modern culture it is important to be aware of its human centered approach to life and intellectual thought. The enlightenment's emphasis on human autonomy gave new definitions to terms such as faith, truth and freedom. It will be our purpose to compare and contrast the humanistic definition of the term "faith" with the Biblical definition. We will find that the Bible sees faith quite differently, and that the imposition of humanistic definitions upon Scripture allows the Bible to "behave" in modern and postmodern society. Later papers will deal with the difference between the humanistic and Biblical concepts of truth and freedom.

### **Humanistic Definition of Faith**

The era of the enlightenment brought to full expression the humanistic tendencies to autonomy from God and His Word that have characterized humanity since the inception of sin. To understand a humanistically defined faith, let us explore the faith of a scientist in his hypothesis, a historian in his thesis, and a banker in granting a mortgage.

The banker does careful analysis before he grants a loan. Factors such as age, sex, health, payment history, net worth, and income are studied with reference to current banking experience. Based on these factors, the banker may come to the conclusion that there is a 99.8 percent chance that this loan will be repaid as agreed. Relying upon his skill as an analyst, the banker has enough "faith" to be willing to grant the loan.

The historian analyzes his sources, their probable reliability, and the way that they relate to other pieces of data such as these provided by historical documents, archaeology, carbon fourteen, climatology, etc. After synthesizing these data, he interprets them in terms of his own historical frame of reference and worldview. Based upon this synthesis and interpretation, a "faith" statement is made regarding the reality and significance of some event.

The scientist likewise collects datum in the laboratory, synthesizes it, and then interprets it based upon “known” facts. A “faith” statement is then made about how new pieces of datum will fit into the current model.

In each of these examples, faith is grounded upon the evidence or the “datum” as interpreted by the particular model of the banker, historian, or scientist. Based upon the interpretation of the evidence at hand, a conclusion or “faith” statement is made. This method of defining faith uses a humanistic, or man centered approach to knowledge.

Humanistically defined faith has the following elements:

1. The process generally starts with doubt—attempting to prove the validity of the assertion in order to offer it as truth—as worthy of one’s faith.
2. It relies upon the genius, creativity, initiative, freedom of exploration, and capabilities of mankind.
3. It relies upon the five senses as a basis for collecting the relevant datum.
4. It integrates the datum and interprets them on the basis of our common experience and understanding of the world.
5. The result is a probability statement as to what things are like or as to how new pieces of datum entering the system will relate to the old.
6. In summary, the datum are brought together in such a way as to yield a conclusion as to how things probably are. The conclusion is in the hand of humanity. It is under the control of mankind. It is a human achievement. It is created by man upon a human basis such as reason or some other human faculty.

### **The Use of Humanistic Faith in the Bible**

There are many illustrations of humanistic faith in the Bible. For example, the desire to live independently from God was demonstrated in the sin of Genesis three. God had made a declaration that Adam and Eve were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis. 2:17). Their decision to do so started with doubt implanted by Satan; “you will not surely die,” followed by the promise that eating the fruit would make one like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis. 3:5,6). The decision to partake of the tree was not founded upon fidelity to the Word of God. It was founded upon a combination of empirical and philosophical thinking. The serpent has performed the empirical experiment and had exhilarating results. “If I perform the same experiment, I will become like God. In addition, the threat of death makes no sense. A God of love would not destroy a creature that He has created.” The decision based upon science and reason brought God’s Word into doubt. Instead of using God’s Word as the basis for understanding the tree, Eve decided to make her determination of how to understand and relate to the tree from a standpoint of total independence of the Word of God.

The antediluvians made a similar decision. They would not accept the Word of God as the basis for determining whether there would be a flood. Their delineation of natural law which “God” Himself respected would form the basis of their decision. They doubted the Word of God and therefore decided to test it based upon the humanistic analysis of the world. Science declared that it will not rain and philosophy theorized that a God of love would not destroy the creatures that he had created. On the basis of principles totally independent from faith in the Word of God they made their decision not to enter the ark.

The decision at Kadesh-Barnea was made on the same foundation. God had asked Israel to go up and take the land of Canaan. The ten spies returned from their mission with doubt based upon the report that it was against human reason and evidence to do so. The cities were well protected, the armies were well trained, the soldiers had a superior physique, and the passes were fortified with rocks and missiles that would destroy any approaching army. Military science would indicate that there was not a chance in the world that Israel's untrained armies could be successful. Therefore, based upon humanistic reasoning used totally independent of the Word of God, the decision was made not to take the land. Caleb and Joshua, by contrast, were ready to go purely and simply by faith in the command of the Word of the Lord.

In each of these circumstances, a discussion was made which was based upon a humanistic concept of faith.

1. The process started with doubt.
2. It relied upon the genius, creativity, initiative, freedom of exploration, and capabilities of mankind.
3. It relied upon the five senses as a basis for collecting the relevant datum.
4. It integrated the datum and interpreted them on the basis of our common experience and understanding of the world.
5. The result was a probability statement as to the best action to take.
6. In summary, the datum were brought together in such a way as to yield a conclusion as to how things probably are. The conclusion was in the hand of mankind. It was under human control. It was a human achievement. It was that created by man upon a human basis such as reason or some other human faculty.

### **Biblical Definition of Faith**

Each of the actors in these three illustrations used their human resources as a foundation for testing faith in God's Word. In each case God's Word was found wanting when placed in the crucible of human analysis. As contrasted with this humanistic approach, faith in God and His Word must not be defined relative to that which is observed within the human sphere. Rather, we must allow God Himself as revealed in His Word the privilege of providing the definition. Satan does not care how much we study the Bible so long as we impose his definitions upon Biblical terminology. By so doing, Satan can make the Bible speak his language rather than God's message. If Satan can convince us to define faith humanistically, he has thereby converted us to salvation by intellectual works rather than by the gift of God. He has succeeded in severing our relation with God by making us our own savior.

The Biblical definition of faith is in marked distinction to the humanistic enlightenment concept. The humanistic approach to faith places our confidence upon the foundation of human reason and sense experience; upon our ability to collect, synthesize, and interpret the "evidence".<sup>2</sup> By contrast, Biblical faith is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). We were dead in

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<sup>2</sup>It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with Ellen White's statements that faith is based upon evidence. An entire paper needs to be devoted to these statements to do them justice. We will simply comment on these statements briefly since they seem to contradict White's understanding of the limitations and proper use of reason, the authority of Scripture, the method by which Scripture receives its confirmation, the nature of faith, and of the role of argumentation in bringing about conversion.

The statements under study occur in a chapter in *Steps to Christ* entitled "What to Do With Doubt." This same chapter seems to excerpted from a chapter in volume 5 of the *Testimonies* entitled, "The Mysteries of the Bible a Proof of Its Inspiration." (*Testimonies*, vol.5 p.699) The introductory and concluding paragraphs, however, of which the paragraph under discussion is one, are additions to the volume 5 materials. The *Steps to Christ* chapter, "What to Do With Doubt," (*Steps to Christ*, p.105) is also parallel to an abbreviated treatment of the subject in the book *Education* entitled, "Mysteries of the Bible." (*Education*, p.169)

trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind. But we are now made alive through the grace of Jesus Christ, which comes by faith—a faith that is not the creation of human works, but the gift of God (Ephesians 2:1-10).

This faith does not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:5). It is founded upon the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Ellen White also asserts the same teaching as Scripture: “Faith that enables us to receive God’s gifts is itself a gift, of which some measure is imparted to every human being. It grows as exercised in appropriating the Word of God. In order to strengthen faith, we must often bring it in contact with the word.” (Ed., p. 253, 254). “No man can create faith. The spirit operating upon and enlightening the human mind creates faith in God. In the Scriptures faith is stated to be the gift of God, powerful unto salvation, enlightening the hearts of those who search for truth as for hidden treasure” (Ellen G. White, 7 BC, p. 940). Thus faith is the gift of God rather than a human creation.

Faith is not the creation of human intellect; it comes as a gift from God through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:16). God has given a measure of faith to each person (Romans 12:3). Faith is

It is tempting to reinterpret these statements from the standpoint of humanism in order to support rational, empirical, and existential argumentation as the foundation for accepting scriptural authority. However, neither the general context of Ellen White’s teaching nor the specific context of the passage allow for this reinterpretation. The “evidence” referred to is mystery in the Bible.

In brief, the argument goes like this: There is mystery in God. Those who come with unbelief will doubt God all the more when they cannot comprehend this mystery in God, whereas, those who come to God in faith will have their faith confirmed by this mystery. Likewise, there is mystery in the Bible. For those who start with doubt, this mystery will deepen their unbelief. Those who start with faith will find the mystery in the Bible to even strengthen their faith. Thus we see that Ellen White’s statements on evidence are taken out of the context of her general writing and out of the specific context of these statements when they are reinterpreted from a humanistic viewpoint.

born of God, for the witness of God is greater than the witness of man (1 John 5:4-13). Faith does not have its foundation in human wisdom; rather it is Christ who is “the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:1).” “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself (John 12:32)”. Christ dwells in our hearts through faith in order that we might know the love of God which surpasses all knowledge (Ephesians 3:19).

Faith is itself the assurance, the conviction and the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). “Faith is not the ground of our salvation, but it is the great blessing – the eye that sees, the ear that hears, the feet that run, the hand that grasps. It is the means, not the end. If Christ gave His life to save sinners, why shall I not take that blessing? My faith grasps it, and thus my faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. Thus resting and believing, I have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ellen G. White, SDA Bible Commentary, Vol. 6, p. 1073). By contrast, were faith based on the datum of the human senses as described in the humanistic definition above, it would be a leap in the dark, for human knowledge is uncertain.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 11:17 see also Galatians 3:2-5; John 10:24-29). “Our assurance and evidence is God’s Word.”(2 SM, p. 243). To attempt to use the datum of reason, the senses or philosophy as criteria for determining whether or not Scripture is the Word of God is to doubt that which God has already declared. It is similar to Satan’s temptation of Christ in the wilderness, namely, to doubt the Word of God that had already affirmed His Sonship (See 1 John 3:6-13). “Genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the Scriptures.” (DA, p. 126, see also EW, p. 72; GW, p. 260).

“The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the

thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12 cf. 6:5). The Word of God is the sword of the spirit (Ephesians 6:17). The Word of God brought worlds into existence; it gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf (cf. Ed p. 254). It is not dead letters on the page of a book. It is the living Word of God! When we read it, it is as if God Himself were in the room speaking to us (cf. FE p. 433; In HP p. 134). When we submit to God’s Word, our faith rests not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (2 Corinthians 2:5). The Bible does not need the power of human wisdom for its acceptance. It makes its own way into the human heart when that heart is open to the operation of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit and the Word work together “The Spirit operating upon and enlightening the human mind, creates faith in God” (Ellen G. White, 7 BC, p. 940). “There is a kind of faith that takes it for granted that we have the truth; but the faith that takes God at His word, which works by love and purifies the heart, is very rare” (Life Sketches, pp. 277-78). To base faith in Scripture upon the description of a historian or a geologist, however useful these disciplines may be, is not yet to come to Biblical faith. Biblical faith comes through the Word and the work of the Spirit.

### **Examples of Biblical Faith**

Hebrews 11 enumerates many of God’s chosen messengers, and emphasizes that they were successful in carrying out God’s will for their lives because they responded to Him in faith. Not only did each of these preach a message of faith in God, they also lived by faith, a faith that was exercised in view of the second coming (Hebrews 10:37, 38). Although they did not see the things that were promised of God, their faith gave them assurance that God’s promises and warnings would be fulfilled (Hebrews 11:10, 13, 39). “By faith Noah, . . . prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he . . . became heir of the righteousness which is according to

faith” (Hebrews 11:7). Noah was given a message for his generation warning of the destruction of the earth by a worldwide flood. It was a message to depart from idolatrous and self-serving ways by turning back to the worship of the true God. Salvation was available for those who desired to enter the ark.

Put yourself in Noah’s place, and try to understand the faith required of Noah to fulfill God’s call. It had never rained. There had never been a destructive flood. The people were happy with their evil ways, and with their “designer god” who allowed them to live in sin. Noah was being asked to commit his resources and 120 of the best years of his life to a cause that was not only unpopular, but which seemed foolish in the eyes of the people.

Ellen White describes the fidelity of Noah to the Word of God: “The wise men of this world talked of science and the fixed laws of nature, and declared that there could be no variation in these laws, and that this message of Noah could not possibly be true. The talented men of Noah’s time set themselves in league against God’s will and purpose, and scorned the message and the messenger that He had sent. When they could not move Noah from his firm and implicit trust in the word of God, they pointed to him as a fanatic, as a ranting old man, full of superstition and madness. Thus they condemned him because he would not be turned from his purpose by reasoning and theories of men. It was true that Noah could not controvert their philosophies, or refute the claims of science so called; but he could proclaim the Word of God; for he knew it contained the infinite wisdom of the Creator, and, as he sounded it everywhere, it lost none of its force and reality because men of the world treated him with ridicule and contempt” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, April 18, 1895, pp. 243-44).

It is important to notice that Noah was not able to answer the philosophical and scientific arguments of the scholarly community. He relied upon the Word of God instead of human argumentation. Noah lived by faith in the Word of God.

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. . . . By faith he sojourned in . . . a foreign country, dwelling in tents. . . . By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. . . . Of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead” (Hebrews 11:8, 9, 17-19).

Any reasonable evangelistic committee would not have accepted God’s request for Abraham to leave family and friends and the cultural metropolis of Ur of the Chaldees. The opportunities for evangelism were certainly much greater at one of the economic cross roads of the world than they would be in the nomadic land of Canaan. But it was not the place of Abraham to question God’s call. “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.’ Hebrews 11:8 “Abraham’s unquestioning obedience is one of the most striking evidences of faith to be found in all the Bible. To him, faith was ‘the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.’” Verse 1. Relying upon the divine promise, without the least outward assurance of its fulfillment, he abandoned home and kindred and native land, and went forth, he knew not whither, to follow where God should lead . . . . He could not even explain his course of action so as to be understood by his friends. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and his motives and actions were not comprehended by his idolatrous kindred” (PP, p. 126).

Abraham also operated upon the principles of Biblical faith. Since his contemporaries based their lives upon humanistic principles, they could not understand the faith-based decisions of Abraham.

The command to sacrifice his son Isaac was even more “unreasonable” from a human perspective. The request seemed totally contrary to God’s character and to His promise. It could only associate Abraham with the heathen and their child sacrifices, certainly not a very good way to represent God in the land of Canaan. Furthermore, Abraham could be seen as a murderer. And, if God failed to resurrect Isaac, how could Abraham ever face Sarah and the rest of his household? “By faith Abraham offered Isaac!” Abraham lived by faith in the Word of God.

Caleb and Joshua also operated by faith when they challenged Israel to obey the Word of the Lord to depart from Kadesh-barnia and go up to take the land of Canaan. From a human military standpoint, the task was impossible. Israel was untrained and unarmed. The Canaanites were well prepared for battle. They had the latest techniques, the best weapons, and their cities were well fortified. No “god” in his right mind would take a nomadic tribe into such potential slaughter. But Caleb and Joshua heeded the voice of God, and urged Israel to take the land under God’s blessing (Num 14:7-9, 22, 24, 30).

By faith Caleb and Joshua also led Israel against Jericho. “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days” (Hebrews 11:30). Imagine the faith of those who thought of taking the city by marching around it for seven days. Caleb and Joshua lived by faith in the Word of God.

Christ lived by the same faith in the Word of God. The temptation of Christ in the wilderness was similar to the temptation of Adam and Eve in the garden. Adam and Eve were tempted on their willingness to rely upon the Word of God alone in their decision as to how to

relate to the tree in the center of the garden. Unfortunately, they did not choose to be guided by that Word. The fallen angel questioned what had already been declared by God, “Has God indeed said?” (Genesis 3:1). “Is it really true that you will die if you eat of the fruit? Look at what your senses tell you. The serpent has eaten of the fruit and now has the gift of tongues! If you perform the same scientific experiment, your powers will be increased also; you will become as Gods and will never die! Furthermore,” the tempter continued, “a God of love would not destroy a creature whom He has created. Philosophy tells us that would be contrary to reason. Therefore, it is all right to ignore the Word of God and eat of the fruit.”

“Christ in the wilderness of temptation stood in Adam’s place to bear the test he failed to endure” (Ellen G. White, 5 BC 1081 Cf. DA p. 118). The setting for the temptations of Christ in the wilderness was His baptism. The voice of God spoke at the baptism of Jesus saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16-17). Satan was among the witnesses of that event. He understood that God through Christ was re-establishing direct contact with the human race. The most intense hatred of Christ arose in his heart. The majestic voice of Jehovah, affirming Jesus as His Son was to Satan like a death knell. He immediately determined to break contact between heaven and earth by tempting Jesus to sin (Ellen G. White, 5 BC, p. 1078).

Satan was given that opportunity. Jesus went into the wilderness and fasted for forty days. While weak and emaciated from hunger, the tempter came to Him with the same temptation in Eden, casting doubt on the Word of God. At His baptism, God had just declared Jesus to be the His Son. Now Satan questioned, “If you are the Son of God” (Matthew 4:3). Christ had the same options open to him as were available to Adam and Eve. He could have

answered, “Why yes, I will give you scientific proof of my Sonship, I will turn these stones into bread.” Or, He could have questioned his Sonship from a philosophical standpoint—“A God of love would not allow His Son to be alone in the wilderness without food and companionship, and subject to the wild beast of the desert.” Instead Christ answered firmly on each of the three occasions, “It is written! (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).” The temptation was for Christ to take himself out of His Father’s hands, to distrust God’s goodness, and disbelieve His Word and authority. It was a temptation to live independently—autonomously-- from His Father and to work a miracle on His own behalf. Its purpose was to attempt to cause Christ to prove His divinity on His own. Christ won the victory by faith, relying upon the Word of God alone. A “thus saith the Lord” was more powerful than any miracle or evidence appealing to the senses. It was above all human needs—“I don’t have to have bread, but I must live by the Word of God!”

The Word of God was the starting point and foundation for the decision of Christ. No room was left for doubt in His mind. By contrast, humanistic faith starts with doubt. Doubt is a link in the chain to achieving faith. Doubt is part of the process of faith formation.

### **The Biblical Warning Against Doubt**

The contemporary humanistic way of thinking begins with doubt. Everything is questioned from a human perspective in order to determine what is truth. That which survives the fire of cross-examination is considered rock-solid knowledge, something on which to place one’s “faith”. Some apply the same method to the Bible, calling everything into question from a scientific, historical, psychological, philosophical, archaeological, or geological perspective in order to determine what is truth in the Bible. The very method itself starts with and builds upon

doubt in the veracity of Scripture. Only that portion of the Bible, which successfully passes the crucible of human investigation, is accepted as truth.

### **The Biblical Teaching on Doubt**

Scripture does not condone such doubt. Paul warns us not to cast away our confidence (Hebrews 10:35-38). He then follows this warning with Hebrews 11, the great faith chapter. In Romans, Abraham is commended because he did not waiver through unbelief, but had faith that God would do the unbelievable, and provide Him a son (Romans 4:20). Abraham thereby became the father of the faithful. By contrast, "He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind." (James 1:6).

Before casting out the demon from the boy tormented from birth, Jesus chastised the crowd; "O unbelieving generation. (Luke 9:41 cf. vs. 12:26-34; Matthew 6:29-34)." In response to the father's request for help, Christ answered, "Everything is possible for him who believes." Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (cf Mark 9:16-24). Jesus also castigated Peter for his unbelief at the time he walked on the water: "Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:31 cf. Mark 4:35-41). Faith rather than unbelief gives power even to move mountains (Matthew 21:21; Mk 11:23).

The consequences of unbelief are serious. The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against Paul and Barnabus (Acts 14:2, 3). The people of Nazareth did

not see the miracles of Jesus because of their unbelief (Matthew 13:58; Mk 6:6). Israel hardened its heart in unbelief when it heard the voice of God (Hebrews 3:7, 12, 15, 19). This sin of unbelief kept Israel from entering the Promised Land (Hebrews 3:19). Unbelief results in the branch being cut off from the tree (Romans 11:20).

The unbelieving shall have their part in the second death (Revelation 21:8). The mind and conscience of those who are unbelieving is defiled. Those who have an evil heart of unbelief depart from the living God. They submit to the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:12, 13; cf. Deuteronomy 32:19-22). For that which is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:22, 23). The unbelieving are blinded by the “gods” of this age, for they do not desire the light of the glory of Christ, the image of God, to shine on them (2 Corinthians 4:1-6 cf. Luke 8:11-13). If we harden our hearts against the voice of God, the gospel will not profit us, for God’s word must be received by faith (Hebrews 4:2). Christ decried the fact that there would be so little faith at His second coming (Luke 18:8).

#### **Ellen White on Doubt**

Ellen White expressed the same concern about the destructive nature of doubt: “And this is the object which Satan seeks to accomplish. There is nothing that he desires more than to destroy confidence in God and in his word. Satan stands at the head of the great army of doubters . . . It is becoming fashionable to doubt. There are many who seem to feel that it is a virtue to stand on the side of unbelief, skepticism, and infidelity. But underneath an appearance of candor and humility, it will be found that such persons are actuated by self-confidence and pride. It is a terrible thing to lose faith in God or in his Word. Unbelief strengthens as it is encouraged. There is danger in even once giving expression to doubt; a seed is sown which produces a harvest of its

kind. Satan will nourish the crop every moment. Those who allow themselves to talk of their doubts will find them constantly becoming more confirmed. God will never remove every occasion for doubt. He will never work a miracle to remove unbelief when he has given sufficient evidence for faith” (SP, Vol. 4, p.349).

The following brief quotations further summarize Ellen White’s thoughts about the insidious nature of doubt:

“Satan is the parent of unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion” (Ellen G. White, 1BC 1087). “It is a sin to doubt (3 SM p.149).” “Disguise it as they may, the real cause of doubt and skepticism, in most cases, is the love of sin” (SC p.111). “Those who love sin will turn away from the Bible, will love to doubt, and will become reckless in principle” (1T p.441). “If we talk doubt, and encourage doubt; we shall have abundant doubt; for Satan will help us in this kind of work (Signs of the Times, “What Atmosphere Surrounds the Soul”, pg. 04). “Jesus never praised unbelief; He never commended doubts” (4T p.232). “Sow not one expression of doubt” (Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, “Was the Blessing Cherished?” p. 09). “If you choose to open the door to the suggestions of the evil one, your mind will be filled with distrust and rebellious questioning. You may talk out your feelings, but every doubt you utter is a seed that will germinate and bear fruit in another’s life, and it will be impossible to counteract the influence of your words” (OHC p.319). “We do not want to speak one word of doubt and thus praise the devil for his wonderful power to keep you in subjection” (Mind, Character, and Personality Vol. 2, p.675).

“I was shown that those who are troubled with doubts and infidelity should not go out to labor for others. That which is in the mind must flow out, and they realize not the effect of a hint

or the smallest doubt expressed. Satan makes it a barbed arrow. It acts like a slow poison, which, before the victim is made sensible of his danger, affects the whole system, undermines a good constitution, and finally causes death. It is just so with the poison of doubt and unbelief of Scripture facts. One who has influence suggests to others that which Satan has suggested to him, that one scripture contradicts another; and thus, in a very wise manner, as though he had found out some wonderful mystery which had been hid from believers and the holy in every age of the world, he casts midnight darkness into other minds. They lose the relish they once had for the truth” (1 T, p. 377).

### **Biblical Examples of Doubt**

If Eve had displayed true Biblical faith, a sad portion of Biblical history would be rewritten. It would go like this: “By faith, when confronted by the serpent in the tree in the Garden of Eden, Eve was victorious through her allegiance to the Word of God. She responded to Satan, “God has said ‘You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.’” Instead, Eve responded with methodological doubt in the word of God. By also starting with doubt, the contemporary process of learning continues the same method Eve used in the garden.

The antediluvians employed the same approach to argue against Noah. Science said that it would not rain, while theology and philosophy claimed that a God of love would not destroy the creatures of His creation. Therefore they doubted the Word of God.

Israel followed the same procedure of doubt in the Word of God when it responded to Caleb and Joshua. God cannot possibly ask us to go up against the Canaanites, they argued. It is

unreasonable for Him even to consider it. Far better it would have been for us if we had died in Egypt or in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 9:23).

At the end of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Christ comes to a decisive conclusion: If you will not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will you be persuaded though one rise from the dead! (Luke 16:31). Just as there is power in faith, so there is also power in doubt. Doubt builds upon itself. It is contagious, for it can be shared!

### **Humanism Versus the Word of God**

There is a major difference between the belief system of the messengers of God discussed above, and those who rejected the Word of God. Eve, the antediluvians, and Israel at Kadesh-barnea wished to found their belief s humanistically—upon the evidences of their senses, logic, philosophy, observation. They wanted a reasonable belief in a “designer god” who fit their view of the world. Instead of founding their human study upon the Word of God, they sought to test the Word of God by their human study. By contrast, Noah, Abraham, Caleb, Joshua, and Christ accepted the Word of God by faith. They had a belief based upon an “It is written,” and therefore accepted the God who revealed Himself instead of the idols of human making.

Paul warned: “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith. . . . Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:6-9). The difference between the humanistic systems of the world and God’s system is outlined in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. The world bases faith in the wisdom of men. Some seek signs—that which can be

measured, seen, touched, tasted, and heard. Others look for philosophical reasoning. For the former, the cross is a stumbling block, for the latter, it is foolishness. These humanistic systems are contrasted with God's system, which rest in the power and wisdom of God rather than in men, for the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. Thus our faith rests in the power of God rather than in the wisdom of men (I Corinthians 1:17-2:5).

The following chart compares the humanistic faith systems of the world with the Biblical concept of faith:

### **Humanistic and Biblical Concepts of Faith Compared**

<b>The Humanistic Concept</b>	<b>The Biblical Concept</b>
1. Starts with doubt in order to prove the assertion.	1. Starts with the gift of God.
2. Relies upon the autonomy of humanity.	2. Relies upon the Word of God.
3. Based upon the five senses.	3. Based upon the power of God rather than the wisdom of men.
4. Interprets datum based upon our understanding of the world.	4. God's Word is the basis for understanding the world. "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God" (Hebrews 11:3).
5. The resultant faith statement relies upon the genius, creative reason, senses, and autonomy of humanity.	5. Faith is itself the substance, the evidence.

Some are concerned that the Biblical concept of faith does away with reason and sensory data in human experience. However, this fear has no Biblical foundation. God gave

us our reason and our senses. He wants us to develop them to their fullest possible expression. However, He desires that we use them within the context of His Word rather than independently. The various aspects of my house might illustrate the relationship between reason and the Bible. The construction of my house was guided by a set of plans. The entire house was built upon a foundation. My house also has a living room, kitchen, bedrooms, doors, and windows. It would not be a house if it did not have these elements. But my house would collapse if I turned it upside down in attempt to place it on the roof instead of on the foundation! So our lives are composed of many elements-- reason, the five senses, emotions, social relations, spirituality, and so on. All of these elements are essential to living a full life. However, if one of these elements is made the guide or foundation in place of the Bible, our lives will collapse.

The major issue in the Great Controversy is our relation to the Word of God, and thus to God Himself. Will we exalt our opinions and ourselves next to God Himself and make our reason or sense experience the foundational authority? Or will we submit our intellect and lives to God's Word and acknowledge His authority? Will the foundation for our lives be humanistic or Biblical? Will faith in God's Word provide the foundation of our knowledge and freedom (another paper), or will we use our knowledge and freedom as a foundation for accepting God's Word?

It is tempting to try to compromise between God's system and the systems of the world. We so often try to find something half way between faith and reason, and the natural world and special revelation. But there is no compromise between the two systems. When we adopt the

systems of the world, we cannot at the same time say that we are living in harmony with God's system.

The difference between the humanistic systems of the world and the Biblical concept of faith can be illustrated by the difference between the games of soccer and ping-pong. There is no common ground between these two games that would allow compromise between them. Which ball would they use? Which ball court could accommodate a compromise between the two? Which rules would they use, and who would umpire the game. The games are so different that they cannot be blended. A ping-pong ball and paddle on the soccer field would be ludicrous. Imagine the soccer player bringing his ball and foot to the ping-pong table. One team could ask the other to join them on their ball court to play their ball game, but they could not compromise the games in such a way as to blend the two.

So Noah, Caleb and Joshua, and Christ all worked on completely different sets of principles than their contemporaries. Abraham's relatives could not even understand his response to God's call. Noah could not controvert the arguments of the scientists on their ground. But they could invite their contemporaries to join them in their ballpark, and play their ball game, based upon their rules of faith rather than the humanistic principles of the world. They proclaimed the gospel, and it lost none of its power because they did not compromise with the humanism of the age. So as Christians living at the end of time, we must also live by faith God's Word instead of by the humanism of our age.

God is calling Seventh-day Adventists to think Biblically rather than humanistically. God is looking not only for conversion of the heart, but also conversion of the mind. He would

like us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). This includes a willingness to see things from God's perspective rather than from the perspective of the world.

God's people will not value their own ideas more than God's as did Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They will not use philosophy to decide how a God of love *must* act as did those who lived just prior to the Flood. They will not use human logic as their basis for judging the promises of God as did Israel at Kadesh-barnea. Rather, they will stand—as did Noah, Caleb and Joshua, and Christ Himself—on the firm “Thus saith the Lord.” When we teach our young people to think from the perspective of the Scripture, we will be giving them the stability and the power of the Word of God. They will not be swayed by every wind of doctrine that comes from the intellectual world. The significance of the Bible, that great foundational rock, will be understood. They will accept God's invitation to join Him in his ballpark playing by His rules of His game.