



FAITHFULNESS TO THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

**This is the time for unwavering
commitment to
the remnant church.**

In his book *Power Through Prayer*, Edward M. Bounds writes that “men are God’s method. The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. . . . What the church needs today is not more or better machinery, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come upon machinery, but on

men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer.”¹

The same is true for the study of God’s Word—for theology. The church is looking for better theologians. God is looking for better men and women. What the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs most today is not better theology, nor a new theol-

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ogy, not a theology to meet the times or culture, or more and novel theological methods. It needs men and women whom the Holy Spirit touches and can use to both articulate biblical theology and personally model its implications for everyday life and faith.

The Holy Spirit does not flow through theology, theological systems, or carefully articulated doctrine. He flows through men and women. The Holy Spirit does not anoint theology; He anoints men and women who unfold the Word of God, who do theology, so that their theology is biblical, spiritual, empowered, engaging the entire person. This builds confidence and certainty, and persuades. To do this, God needs students of the Word who will live holy lives. He needs those who understand that spiritual things are not only spiritually discerned; but also spiritually articulated: “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Cor. 2:13, NIV).

P. T. Forsyth notes that the theologian “should first not be a philosopher but a saved man, with eternal life working in him.”² Philip Hughes asserts that “the creative task of theology is, first of all, the task of the redeemed who, through the prior grace of God, have returned to the Father by the Son, and through the inner workings of the Holy Spirit *have been*

put in tune with the mind of Christ.”³

These things are at the heart of the Adventist Theological Society’s affirmation of personal faithfulness to the Seventh-day Adventist Church along with the pledge to continue personally supporting it through tithes, offerings, personal effort, and influence. The society is comprised of Seventh-day Adventist men and women. It does not exist in abstraction. There is ever a personal element to what this means. The affirmation of personal faithfulness touches the inner life of all theologians and any genuine pursuit or affirmation of a truly life-changing theology, doctrine, or truth.

As “theology is a function of the Church,”⁴ there is a sense in which there can be no theology without the church. Theologians themselves are part of the church. More specifically, they are always the theologians of a particular church, who receive the truth in its communion, share its convictions, and promise to teach and propagate its values as long as they do not prove contrary to the Word of God. This is assumed of Seventh-day Adventist theologians and other thought leaders—that the DNA of biblical Adventism possesses them, that they work within its organizing reality.

Their theology and corresponding personal lifestyles comes in the context of Adventist distinctives, corresponding confessional context, and the church’s mission and work in the

world. This comprises the understanding of the Adventist community as a prophetic movement fulfilling the specifications of the end-time remnant identified in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 12-14). The moral imagery of an eschatological people maintaining a rhythm of obedience (Rev. 12:17; 14:12), holding to a prophetic/apocalyptic worldview and the life it articulates, i.e., the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17), who are personally undefiled and blameless (Rev. 14:3-5), and who proclaim the everlasting gospel (Rev. 14:6-13), highlights personal faithfulness in keeping with theological truth. Such implied moral excellence (both in relation to theology and lifestyle) is not cultural in that theologians are merely part of a particular church whose values the church is obligated to uphold. Rather it is authentic in that Adventist DNA literally possesses them in the totality of their commitment to following the Lamb wherever He goes (Rev. 14:4).

These things are not just to be held intellectually. There is personal faithfulness to the church through tithes, offerings, personal effort, and influence because all resonate with the church's message, work, and mission. There is personal faithfulness because all are part of the body, asked to steward faithfully what that body has entrusted them with. Biblical imagery of the body of Christ emphasizes the corporate dimension of a personal re-

lationship to God, which explains why individuals wish to be faithful to the corporate community (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:1-16). The moral/spiritual reality of this corporate unity with Christ and His Father will leave a profound impression on the world (John 17:21). How church members personally conduct themselves in the household of God is an integral part of both how they handle truth and exhibit personal truthfulness (1 Tim 3:15). Thus there is always need for a correspondence between the theological task and personal convictions, support, and life.

In the midst of outlining some very tangible duties and responsibilities of the church's thought leaders, the apostle Paul reminded the young leader/theologian Timothy of these very personal matters: "you, Timothy, certainly know what I teach, and how I live, and what my purpose in life is. You know my faith, my patience, my love, and my endurance" (2 Tim. 3:10, NLT). And again, "You must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you" (vs. 14). You can trust the theology (what you have learned), Timothy, because you know the source. You know me!

Even more directly, Paul exhorts the young theologian, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will

save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4:16, NIV).

Life and theology are inseparable. Adventist theologians understand how their own moral/spiritual personhood impacts both their theological enterprise and the power of their theological influence truly to spiritually transform lives in faithful support of the church’s message and mission. There is both modeling and mentoring. Only personal faithfulness to the body and the Lord of the body accomplishes these.

Faithfulness is an enduring biblical value, which mirrors the very character and personal commitment of God Himself (Deut. 7:9; 1 Cor. 1:9). We are never more like God than when we personally manifest unwavering, consistently loyal, conscientious, reliable, and committed faithfulness to the church God Himself so dearly loves. “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, . . . that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service,” Paul told Timothy (1 Tim. 1:12, NIV).

Would not God desire such of today’s Adventist thought leaders who have been placed in the service of His church? “What you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well” (2 Timothy 2:2, NRSV).

Who theologians are in character and spiritual life influences what the church sees itself to be in its character and spiritual life (2 Tim. 2:2; 3:10,

14). Who theologians are in character and spiritual life influences the theologians they are working alongside of and those they are mentoring as future thought leaders in the church. This is how theologians’ character and spiritual life effectively touches the church’s nature, mission, and unity. This is why personal faithfulness to the Seventh-day Adventist Church along with the pledge to continue personally supporting it through tithes, offerings, personal effort, and influence are so important.

Personal faithfulness to God’s church and a trustworthy message ever go hand in hand. As Solomon observed: “Trustworthy messengers refresh like snow in summer. They revive the spirit of their employer” (Prov. 25:13, NLT). May every Adventist student of Scripture be so personally refreshing to the church that calls them to steward God’s truth in their midst. This we affirm! □

REFERENCES

¹ Edward M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (New Kensington, Pa.: Whitaker House, 1982), pp. 8, 9.

² Peter Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), p. 305.

³ Philip E. Hughes, “The Creative Task of Theology,” in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, Philip E. Hughes, ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 25, italics supplied.

⁴ Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God: Prolegomena to Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), vol. 1, part I, p. 1.