

Andrew J. Camenga's

Statement of Belief

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In a letter to Timothy, Paul quoted an early Christian confession. The confession said “Great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.” (1 Timothy 3:16 NASB) Common confession has been an element of Christianity since it began. Whether it was simply “Jesus is Lord” or something as complex as the recent Catechism of the Catholic Church, Christians have expressed their corporate unity in terms of what they believe. This work at expressing belief is confession. It is part of the daily life of every believer. We are called to confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9). Words and deeds proclaim to those we meet what is at the center of our lives. Yet, we rarely strive to capture the essence of our belief in words. Within the Christian church, part of our confession is that we shall know the truth and the truth shall set us free (John 8:32). Central to Christianity is that Jesus Christ embodies and is the only complete path to that Truth. Implied by the confession just made is that Truth exists and can be known. It is appropriate that individuals and groups are occasionally called to express what they believe.

We live in a world that equates belief and opinion. We live in a society that frequently does not distinguish between truth and feeling. In the world, some people think Christianity is old, antiquated, and probably bigoted. For those people, Christianity becomes a problem that society needs to solve. This group would either deny the existence of truth or deny the ability of Christians to discover it. They have evidence to support their claim. We stand today in the midst of a divided Christian message. Christianity does distinguish between Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Episcopal, Orthodox, and Pentecostal. We proclaim one truth, but we experience diversity in method and doctrine. This difference between deeply held belief and our experience brings us face to face with one of the hardest parts of the Christian life. Belief and experience, thought and feeling do, at times, diverge.

This divergence brings question and crisis. It places our faith in a difficult position. There are no easy answers in these times of crisis. We hold to what is most deeply believed. We begin the process of reshaping and re-understanding the world around us. Christians turn to God revealed in Jesus Christ as the center and core of their belief. God exists and reveals Himself to humanity. He does this through His Son, Jesus Christ. As the core of our faith, all other things are based on that.

The Bible

Many years separate us from the events that surround the life of Jesus of Nazareth. We did not see him. Our parents did not see him. To claim that God revealed in Jesus Christ is the core of our faith makes some people laugh. It makes others question how we know that our proclamation of Jesus, our confession of faith, is trustworthy. Our answer is that God provided for a trustworthy written record of His activity with humans. That written record is the Bible. It is a document inspired by God’s spirit. It functions as our final authority in matters of faith and practice.

The Bible is a document written by many people over a long period and gathered by people of faith to serve as a guide for their community. It contains many forms of written material: poetry, prose, narrative, genealogy, and parable. It was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. It describes the action of God and God’s people through history. The Bible claims that God created the world we live in now. This is the document Christians turn to when faced with questions they cannot answer. This is the document Christians turn to for confirmation of answers already formulated. The Bible functions as an authority in life of Christians.

There is a difference between calling the Bible an authority and calling it the authority. In the world of groups calling themselves Christian today, the Bible does not stand alone as a final arbiter of truth. Some groups place tradition and Scripture alongside each other. Some go so far as place tradition, experience, and Scripture on almost equal footing for describing authority. These groups recognize that they cannot interpret the Bible without some frame of reference. They decided to formalize their framework for biblical interpretation. I know that my experience, my training, my life, and my feelings influence how I approach and what I learn from Scripture. I cannot remove these things before approaching Scripture. I had to know how to hear and speak before I could study. Scripture, the Bible, comes to us in words. We learn words from our parents and the world around us. The words form a language and this language has an impact on how we learn and what we hear. We do not approach the Bible outside of our experience. The groups that list tradition and experience as part of the authority for determining faith and practice are working to understand this part of reality.

Authority comes in many forms. Tradition and experience do influence how I approach Scripture. This influence functions as authority. This kind of authority is real and powerful. However, it is not an authority based directly on God's revealed will. This authority of influence is a secondary reflection of God's will. The reflection is sometimes out of focus. Tradition and experience have led the people of God astray. They do not always correctly guide us toward the will of God. The tradition, experience, and activity of the Pharisees and Sadducees in the time of Christ amply illustrate this. The authority that tradition and experience have must always be checked with the question, "How accurately do they reflect the will of God?"

It is this question that brings me face to face with the reality that God's word is the standard by which to measure our knowledge of God's will. The Bible says that Jesus is the Word of God enfleshed, made human. As the human Word of God, His life becomes the final interpreting authority of God's written word. Jesus used the Hebrew Scriptures as a reliable revelation of God's word. Therefore, we can trust the Old Testament Scriptures to convey to us the very word of God. It is by extension that the gospels and the rest of the New Testament become reliable sources of God's word. God spoke to us through His Spirit in the Scriptures. The Scriptures, because of that God-given guidance, are "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). As reliable sources the Old and New Testaments become the final authority in matters of faith and practice.

The reliability of Scripture in matter of history is a point where others can test Christianity. Much of what Christianity deals with lies beyond the realm of the physical and therefore outside of that which can be verified. The Scripture is a point of contact with the physical realm. There are difficult passages in the Bible. There are passages that seem to be in conflict with each other. Careful archeological work has not verified all the biblical events. Some difficult passages can be dealt with through "creative harmonization". Some do not lend themselves to any answer. The weight of archeology in the last 100 years does much to lend support to biblical material that was under attack 100 years ago. Yet, the question remains, "Can the Bible be trusted?"

"Can the Bible be trusted?" I answer with a yes. That which the Bible affirms is true. In other words, "The Bible is wholly truthful in all that it affirms" (Finger, Christian Theology, pg. 218). This bypasses questions of spelling and grammar that can never fully codify a living language. It also allows authors to speak of things as they see them (the sun rises) instead of pushing for a scientifically precise answer (the earth rotates). It means that people writing Scripture were allowed to round numbers and summarize, to select and edit other materials, in

the process of writing Scripture. The context and genre of the passages being studied can guide interpretation. Yet, this position insists that what Scripture affirms is true. Thus, when the Scripture affirms that the Red Sea was split and a race of slaves and tagalongs passed through the water on dry ground, the event did happen. Scripture can be trusted in all that it affirms.

God

Above all else, Scripture affirms that God is. The Bible, from start to finish, is a revelation of God: God's nature, God's purpose, God's love. We discover in our study that there is one God who existed before time began and created time. He created and sustains the world, the solar system, the galaxy, and the universe. God is abundant in strength and infinite in understanding (Psalm 147:5). God is perfect, unchangeable in purpose, and omnipotent in speech. Power, majesty, glory, and dominion belong to God Almighty. These descriptions and words should make it abundantly clear that God is beyond any description we can make – God is mystery. Yet, God has made Himself known for King David could follow the very heart of God (Acts 13:22).

The witness of Scripture is clear: God is one. The witness of Scripture is also clear God works with humanity as Father, Son, and Spirit. The hand of the Father is evident from Genesis to Revelation. The work of the Son is made clear in the gospels. Jesus promised the continuing power of God in our lives through His Spirit. The New Testament shows this promise becoming reality. We do not claim that Father, Son and Spirit are separate deities – for there is but one God. Nor do we claim that Father, Son, and Spirit are masks that God uses to deal with humanity – for if only masks then revelation is an unreliable witness to lies behind. Instead, we claim, based on the biblical witness, that God exists eternally in three persons - Father, Son and Spirit. This perception of God is not a set of masks. Instead, it is a true reflection of the nature of God. God is love and lives eternally in “self-sharing, other-regarding, community-forming” love (Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, pg. 64). This incredible love of God expresses itself for us in His desire to share the love in a personal and community-building relationship with everyone.

It is in this understanding of love that we must define omnipotence, omniscience, and immutability. God exercises complete power and complete knowledge. His purpose never changes. Yet, our understanding of His power, knowledge, and purpose may change as He continues to reveal Himself. Jonah was told to cry out against the city of Nineveh. His message was, “yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (3:4). Jonah anticipated the utter destruction of the city as God exercised judgment upon evil. Instead, a change in heart and attitude toward God by the leaders and people overthrew the city. God, that day, “relented” (3:10). His purpose, however, did not change. God brought an entire city into a new understanding of who He was. His power is absolute. His knowledge is infinite. His purpose is unchangeable. God's purpose is to bring us into an eternal covenant community with Him. For that reason, His deep love controls His power and knowledge. God does not overpower our ability to think or act. It is His desire for a God-centered community based on love that gives us the chance to choose God or to choose not God. God loves and is just when He allows the unrepentant person to taste the fruit of sin: death. God loves and forgives the sinner who repents and draws near.

God, who chose to reveal Himself to us in the Scriptures, chooses to let us see Him in the form of His Son. The Son of God, revealed to us as the Word, existed from the beginning and is God. This Son, this word, became flesh and lived among us. While on Earth His name was Jesus. This name now belongs to Him and is a name that is higher than any other name on earth. Jesus,

the messiah, the Son of God, lived on earth as a human. God became human. He was born. He grew. He taught. Jesus Christ is the “radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3 NASB). Jesus lets us know what God looks like in human form.

The amazing thing is that God in human form was not a conquering military leader, a charismatic with the force to knock all people off their feet, or a rich and influential landowner. God, all-powerful God, in human form was a wandering preacher who used His almighty power to free people from bondage by becoming a servant. His servant mindset shows in the work He did and the work He called His followers to do. He never lost track of the one He served and was obedient to God the Father even to the point of dying a humiliating death on the Cross. His life and death demonstrate to us who God is, and what God calls us to be.

His death is the complete and final sacrifice needed for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus Christ, by His willing sacrifice, becomes our Savior. Jesus Christ, as God, is our Lord. Jesus, as human, relates directly to us without the need for a mediator. Jesus, thus, is the mediator between God the Father and humankind.

Jesus promised His disciples that a Comforter would come when He left them. This Comforter would come and help the disciples remember the teaching of Jesus. This Comforter was the Holy Spirit poured on the disciples on the day of Pentecost. The work of the Spirit continues today. God’s Spirit calls us to God. It is the Spirit of God working in our lives that allows us to interpret the Scriptures already God-Breathed. The Spirit makes us ever more aware of the sin in our life and grants us the ability to confront that sin, accept forgiveness, and change our course toward that which is righteous. A new life is created with the Spirit. The old life is gone and we are transformed. This transformation empowers us to build up other believers and proclaim to the world in word and action that God loves them.

Humankind

God loves us? A psalmist once wrote: “When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?” (Psalm 8:3,4 RSV). The world is huge. The universe is gigantic. It is incredible to think that with all of creation God even takes the time to look at our planet, let alone our lives. Even if God takes time to look at us, could He love us? The psalmist answers the question with these words: “Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under His feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea” (Psalm 8:5-8 RSV). God loves humanity. He has placed us in a position of honor and responsibility. This is something that we should take seriously. His hope is that we will all, one day, join in the chorus, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth” (Psalm 8:9 RSV)!

Humans, male and female, have been created in the image of God. We, to this day, do not know exactly what part of us represents God’s image. We are physical and spiritual beings. We use language and create new things. We exercise power and authority over large portions of the created world. These human characteristics do reflect some of God’s revealed nature. As we saw earlier, a major Christian understanding of God is that God is love and lives in community. This part of God’s revealed nature is reflected in the way we are created. God created us to need fellowship with God and humans. Community and responsibility are part of the way God created us. He let Adam and Eve choose between following His word and following their own ideas.

Humanity, as a whole, has been given this opportunity as well. We can choose to follow God or choose to follow something else.

Sin and Salvation

The voice of a serpent calling from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was enough to pull Eve and Adam off course. Their act destroyed the communion they had had with God. Pain, death, increasingly hard work, and broken relationships resulted from their choice to disobey God. Their disobedience was not an isolated act in the history of humanity. God has given humans an understanding of His will for their lives. Humans choose to disobey this. Disobedience to God's revealed will is sin. Adam and Eve's sin broke the relationship they had with God. God drove them from the garden and barred their re-entry. Sin separates people from God. Everyone has sinned. Everyone is therefore separated from God.

This might not be a bleak picture if it were not for the fact that our very nature calls us to relate to God. That is part of how He created us. For humanity to be complete, a personal relationship with God is essential. To be separated from God is to be dead. We are, therefore, in need of a way to restore the relationship with God. We need to find a way to life. Humans need something to bring them back into the presence of God. We need a savior.

Without a Savior, we cannot enter the presence of God. Without a Savior, we are damned. The biblical images of life without God range from discomfort to annihilation. In Jesus' parable about staying alert, the bridesmaids without extra oil were shut out of the party. The rich man in Jesus' story about Lazarus was in fire and burning with heat and thirst. In the parable of the tares, the servants sorted the wheat and tares. At the time of harvest, the tares were burned up. In Revelation, the fate of those not in the book of life was the second death – being cast into a lake of fire created for the devil and his messengers. The Biblical message is clear: Living without a Savior is living in death. This is not what God wants for humanity.

There is only one way to a relationship with God the Father for those who have sinned. Jesus Christ is that way. Salvation, the restoration of a broken relationship with God and the hope for a future eternal community focused on God, is a free gift of God brought to us through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. God fully and completely identified with humanity by becoming human. He lived a life without sin. The communication of Father and Son was never interrupted. Death, for moments, snared this perfect life. God was willing to place on this life the weight of all sin. Through God's gracious hand, sin was paid for, death was conquered, and we were given a chance to once again associate, communicate with God – and look for the day when God's people are called home. God's gift of salvation is freely available to all. The person accepting this gift repents of sins, believes that God raised Jesus from the dead, and proclaims that Jesus is Lord.

Jesus proclaimed that He was the door to life and that those who entered the door would have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). This means more than future happiness. It also means more than having riches unthinkable. Salvation is a restoration of our relationship with God that changes who we were into something that is incredibly new. God's Spirit acting in new ways in our life causes this change. We give God permission to change us from the inside out from the moment we accept Christ as our savior. We are a new creation. This change allows us new insight into life, as God wants us to see it. Those who are God's people have the Spirit working in their life. Those who have God's spirit working in their life can see evidence of the change that God is producing. We call this evidence fruit. Those who have been saved will demonstrate the fruit of the spirit. This fruit is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness,” and “self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). Salvation is God acting in our life now.

Evangelism and Baptism

God acts in our world. He is not bound by some unalterable law that says, “God, You keep your hands off”. He did not wind the world up and let it go. The incarnation of Christ tells us many things about God. One of those is that He is willing to bend what humans have described as “laws of nature” in order to let the true nature of God shine through. God can and does break into our history. Sometimes, God breaks in, in ways that we call miraculous. Commonly, God breaks into history through His people of faith. We are called to do the will of the Father.

The Holy Spirit works in the lives of those who have devoted themselves to Jesus Christ. He allows them to see, think, love, and behave differently than they would otherwise. Jesus told His disciples that the second great commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself”. When asked for a definition of neighbor, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. The neighbor is the person we meet in the midst of life – regardless of our condition or theirs. When we love our neighbor as ourselves, there will come a time when we share God’s gracious and saving message. This is evangelism.

Evangelism is a natural result of God’s love growing in our lives. Yet, God is aware that humans can be stubborn and fearful at times. For that reason, He reinforced what naturally grows out of our reflection of God’s love with a command. The command takes several forms for Jesus undoubtedly worked to make sure His disciples heard Him. The most famous is the Great Commission of Matthew 28. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Jesus gave this command to a specific group of people at a specific point in time. Yet, this command is universal in scope. It is a command to go to *all nations*. It is a command to teach *all that Christ commanded*. Christ also reassured the disciples that He was with them *until the end of the age*.

As God’s Spirit transforms us into the image of Christ, we will work harder to share the good news that God has given us. As God’s love grows in our lives, we will reach out to more people and look especially to those who have little earthly hope. As an outgrowth of love, as an obedient response to command, evangelism is part and parcel of the life of every believer.

Peter and the disciples took to evangelism as soon as the Spirit landed in their lives. They left their place of prayer and hiding on the day of Pentecost and went into the crowds. Peter proclaimed that prophecy had been fulfilled and the day of the messiah had come. Many in the crowd were “pierced to the heart” and asked how to respond to this message. The response of Peter was, “repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”. The decision to repent is something demonstrated through later choices. The reception of the Holy Spirit is made evident by the fruit of the Spirit in the believer’s life. Baptism is the public symbol of repentance, acceptance of God’s gracious gift, and the intent to allow God’s Spirit greater control.

Baptism is a symbol of life regenerated by the power of God. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). Full immersion shows unity with Christ in His complete burial. Breaking the surface of the water shows new life

beginning with Christ. The symbol is strengthened when we realize that Jesus, who did not need to repent, joined us in baptism and set the example that He then called us to follow.

Baptism publicly marks an inner change in the life of an individual. It marks the choice to turn away from lawlessness and to turn toward God. Baptism declares the choice to become a new creature set apart by God for good works (2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:10). It declares the choice to become a member of God's family. Baptism, the action of an individual, marks the beginning of a new life in community. God, through Peter's message on the day of Pentecost, pierced the hearts of the crowd and led them to be baptized and to join with those who accepted Christ. "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Baptism publicly marks entry into God's Kingdom.

The Church and the Lord's Supper

The kingdom of God is near. It has started its work in our world. Although God holds the full reality of his reign from us, He is not in a war with Satan. The devil's fate was sealed from the moment of rebellion. No created thing can oppose God and win. God has called all believers to work in His Kingdom. We stand today between the revelation of God's plan and the fullness of its reality. God holds the fullness of His Kingdom to give all of humanity the chance to accept Him as their God. His kingdom stands in our future. He gives us a taste of that future by establishing a people on earth called together by one name.

The Bible rarely leaves salvation in the realm of individual life. Salvation is linked to God's community. God's covenant with Abraham promised his descendents would be blessed. God called the slaves in Egypt "My people". He promised that this escaped people would become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Through Jeremiah and the author of Hebrews, God promises us that "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and **I will be their** God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33). A people called together and blessed by God represents God's future kingdom now.

This people, called by God, is one. God abolished as membership requirements many of the distinctions that humans use to separate groups. "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:27-29). There is only one body of believers. God gathers it into one community that exists through time and around the globe. This people, called by God, guided by His Spirit, directed by Christ, is called the Church.

Paul described the Church. In Ephesians he wrote, "He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers" (4:11). This was done "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (4:12). God gives gifts to individuals inside the Church. These are given to every believer (4:7; 1 Peter 4:10). The gifts allow those in the Church to do the work of God. Pastors and teachers, evangelists, prophets, and apostles help others discover and use their God given gifts. They will work to build Christ's body into a group unified in faith and knowledge. The goal is a mature group that measures up to the fullness of Christ. "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14). God's love directs the growth that prevents doctrinal instability. Instead of being blown around, the members of the Church speak truth in love. This is so that we can "grow up in all *aspects* into Him, who is the head, *even*

Christ” (4:15). When Jesus Christ is the head “the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (4:16).

God knows that He created humans with finite bodies and finite minds. It is impossible for us to know everyone in the world. We can only work within the capabilities God created in us. For that reason, God uses local congregations to represent the one Body of Christ. The local congregation represents God’s hand in the world. It is the working model of God’s loving community. The congregation stands as an ambassador to the Covenant of God sealed in the blood of Jesus Christ. This means that the local congregation is a covenant community of God’s chosen people.

This framework supports our faithful attempt to represent God’s body in the world. Before people join a local congregation, they must accept and publicly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord. They should submit to baptism and show their unity with our Lord in His death and resurrection. Evidence should exist in their lives that attests to the regenerating power of God’s spirit. It must be understood that joining a local congregation is more than affirming a certain set of doctrines. Joining a local congregation is joining a specific physical manifestation of God’s covenant community. A local church will have in either written or unwritten form a covenant that states how members will behave toward God, each other, and those outside the covenant. This covenant is a two-way document. The group and person desiring membership accept the responsibility the covenant places on them.

A local congregation will do the things expected of the One Church. It will build believers up in love. It will teach the words of God. It will meet the needs that arise within the local group. It will strive to serve Christ by helping those in need of service outside the group. A local congregation will also work to demonstrate the idea that God’s Church is larger than the group. It will work with other congregations. It will work in close association with other churches of like faith in the attempt to create a more effective witness.

We know from experience that the local congregation does stray, at times, from God’s will. While the congregation seeks to do the will of God, it can be distracted from that goal. This distraction functions as a betrayal of God’s power in our world. On the night that Jesus was betrayed He took common symbols from a Jewish feast and added meaning to them. A broken loaf represented His body. A shared cup represented the covenant that the blood of Jesus sealed. These symbols are elements of a ritual that we call the Lord’s Supper. This ritual, properly practiced, brings the focus of the local church back to Jesus Christ. It helps the church remember its shared responsibility as the Body of Christ. Jesus established this ritual to help us remember Him. Paul and the author of Luke indicate that it is something that Christians are to do. The Lord’s supper reminds us “as oft as” we participate that we proclaim to the world the love of God demonstrated in the death of Jesus.

Sabbath and Eternal Life

The death of Jesus Christ was followed by His resurrection. After reassuring the disciples and reinforcing His teaching, Jesus ascended to heaven and sat at the right hand of the throne of God. A day will come when Jesus will return to earth and proclaim the “great and terrible” day of the Lord. This day will see the passing of the present heaven and earth. It will see the presentation of a new heaven, earth, and Jerusalem. God’s people will receive new physical bodies. They will live with God in an eternal community that praises God and brings joy to God’s creatures. Death, pain, misery, and separation will be no more. The people of God will enter a rest prepared for them from the beginning of time.

Just as the new heaven and earth are, this rest is truly beyond description. The rest is foreshadowed in this life by God's gift of the Sabbath. It was established by God at creation. He caused the people of Israel to remember it in the desert as they fled Egypt. God affirmed through the 10 words that the Sabbath was instituted at creation (Exodus 20) and was a celebration of God's saving grace in their lives (Deuteronomy 5). This day is the seventh day of the week and was set apart by God for a variety of purposes.

The Sabbath is primarily described as a day of rest. God told the Israelites not to work for food or fire on that day. Nehemiah demonstrated that commerce was to be avoided. Jesus demonstrated that it is appropriate to gather, study, and worship on the day. He also showed that a view of work that prevents us from doing good to those around us stands in the way of the Sabbath's intent. It is a day that magnifies the freedom that God's love brings to the world. Captives can be set free. The blind can be made to see. The lame and crippled can be healed. Jesus proclaimed that He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE DOWNTRODDEN, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD" (Luke 4:18,19). On a Sabbath, Jesus proclaimed that this Scripture was fulfilled. The Sabbath becomes a day when we focus all our attention on God and His mission.

I believe there is more to the Sabbath than we have even begun to discover. It is a demonstration on this planet of the "rest of joy" that is set before us. It points to a future reality that can only be described in large sweeping strokes of words. Salvation, eternal life and the rest we long for begin at the instant a person accepts the saving love of God displayed through His Son, Jesus Christ. The eternal covenant community we have been invited to join is foreshadowed by the local congregation joined in association with other churches. This eternal covenant community is a reflection of the creator who lives eternally in three persons – Father, Son, and Spirit. Here on earth we struggle with analogy and metaphor to describe what God reveals. There will come a time when we know fully – even as we are now fully known (1 Corinthians 13). May God be praised.