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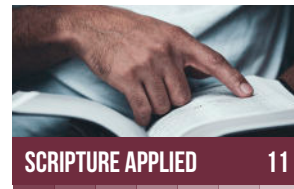
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The Wesleyan Quadrilateral and *Sola Scriptura*

Frank M. Hasel

The question of the role of Scripture in theology is crucial and has occupied the attention of theologians for centuries. Even though opinions vary sharply as to the exact role of Scripture in theology, virtually all Christian theologians within the full spectrum of opinion agree that Scripture has to play some part in Christian theology.¹ Throughout church history, the Bible—the written Word of God to humanity—has played an authoritative role in Christian theology. The German theologian Gerhard Ebeling once suggested that the history of Christianity is simply the history of the interpretation of the Bible.² In Christian theology, the decisive question has been and still is how Scripture is related to other sources of theology, such as tradition, reason, and experience, and what the meaning of *sola Scriptura* is over against these other sources. The *sola Scriptura* principle is the call to judge all faith and practice by Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*). No wonder it has become one of the great “battle cries” of the Protestant Reformation.³ James Packer aptly said that *sola Scriptura* “shows the essential motivation and concern, theological and religious, of the entire Reformation movement.”⁴ According to Markus Barth, the “words *sola Scriptura* are preferably to be interpreted not as a nominative but as an instrumental ablative, ‘by Scripture alone.’ Thus, the formula describes an efficient and normative instrument which God uses and puts into the hands of the church.”⁵ This means that Scripture is the normative standard by which other sources of theology are evaluated and judged. Every theology is influenced to some degree by at least the following sources: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.⁶ The interplay of these sources and which of these sources has the highest and final authority in matters of faith and practice is the decisive question that influences and shapes every theology.⁷ In this article we will look more closely at what has been called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and examine its approach vis-à-vis the *sola Scriptura* principle. This is particularly significant, not only because Ellen G. White, a founding member and influential person of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, came out of Methodism,⁸ but because some have recently claimed that the *sola Scriptura* principle has become problematic and have questioned

“whether conservative Protestants can, in all honesty, continue to give assent to this venerable principle.”⁹

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral¹⁰ is a phrase that stands for a paradigm or model that has come to describe the principal factors of how John Wesley (1703–1791) conceived of the task of theology.¹¹ It represents a modern attempt to summarize the relationship of the four sources in theology (Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience) that guided Wesley and his followers in their reflection on theology. When Methodists today try to answer questions about God and their faith, they use an approach called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. While Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience make up the four sides of the Quadrilateral, the hermeneutical interplay of the four different sources in the formulation of theological positions is more complex.¹² The Wesleyan Quadrilateral asserts the United Methodist Church’s understanding that “Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason. Scripture [however] is primary, revealing the Word of God ‘so far as it is necessary for our salvation.’”¹³ With this concise description of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, we will now provide some brief historical background information to the emergence of this principle.

The Historical Background to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral

Interestingly, Wesley never formulated the succinct statement that is now commonly referred to as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and did not use the word “quadrilateral” in his writings, nor did he approve it.¹⁴ It is a rather new word that was coined by Albert Outler, a respected Methodist theologian,¹⁵ in the late 1960s while serving on the commission on doctrine and doctrinal standards of the United Methodist Church.¹⁶ Outler, who for decades was professor of theology at Southern Methodist University, chose the term “quadrilateral” because of its historic significance as a theological term in the Anglican and Episcopalian traditions, where it was used for the “Lambeth Quadrilateral,” which was

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agreed on at the General Convention of the (Anglican) Protestant Episcopal Church held in Chicago in 1886.¹⁷ It represents the essentials for a reunited Christian church. The Lambeth Quadrilateral affirms Scripture as the rule and ultimate standard of the Christian faith, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the historic episcopate. In the Anglican tradition, a combination of Scripture, tradition, and reason was promoted as early as the sixteenth century.¹⁸ The Wesleyan Quadrilateral added a fourth emphasis, experience, resulting in the four components or "sides" of the quadrilateral: (1) Scripture, (2) tradition, (3) reason, and (4) experience.¹⁹ Wesley never used the term "quadrilateral," and so it might be more appropriate to speak of the "United Methodist Church Quadrilateral" or the "Albert Outler Quadrilateral."²⁰ Since its formulation, the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" has developed a life of its own where people often treat all four sources as of equal authority, thus diminishing the authority of Scripture.²¹ Attaching Wesley's respected name to it lends authority to a theological method that often is misused or misconstrued, which ultimately also leads to a misrepresentation of Wesley himself and what he believed.²²

While the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is somewhat different from the Lambeth Quadrilateral, Outler thought that the term could serve as a helpful way to refer to the complex interaction of the four sources in Wesley's theology.²³ Much later, however, Outler wished he had never done so because it opened a Pandora's box of all sorts of formulations that amounted to allowing either tradition, reason, or experience to trump what the Bible said about some subjects.²⁴ Since Wesley himself did not explicitly articulate his theological method, the attempt to describe the particulars of his theological procedures proves to be a challenge. Nevertheless, one can fairly conclude that the misunderstanding of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral lies in thinking that for Wesley these four sides are equal. The very nature of a geometric term implies an equality or homogenization of the four elements.²⁵ But for Wesley they were not equal. "For him, Scripture always represented the primary source of religious authority."²⁶ Randy L. Maddox states that "Wesley's so-called 'quadrilateral' of theological authorities could more adequately be described as a unilateral *rule* of Scripture within a trilateral *hermeneutic* of reason, tradition, and experience."²⁷ Donald Thorsen even suggests that "if one insists in choosing a geometric figure as a paradigm for Wesley, a tetrahedron—a tetrahedral pyramid—would be more appropriate. Scripture would serve as the foundation of the pyramid, with the three sides labeled tradition, reason, and experience as complementary but not primary sources of religious authority."²⁸

While this perspective seems closer to what John Wesley might have had in mind for his theology, it still raises some important questions about the role and authority of the Bible in theology. When Scripture is primary, revealing the Word of God only "so far as it is necessary for our salvation"²⁹ then merely a central teaching of the Christian faith is revealed in Scripture. But, as has been pointed out, "what is not said here is what authority the Bible has when it addresses issues other than soteriology."³⁰ Furthermore, if Scripture is illumined by tradition, vivified through our personal experience, and confirmed by human reason, it leaves Scripture as the primary source in the theology but not as the sole source of its own exposition. Thus, despite recognizing the primacy and priority of Scripture in the light of tradition, reason, and experience, it ultimately weakens its role as the ultimate and final authority that decides all matters of faith and practice. In giving primacy to Scripture, Wesley and his followers felt free to introduce extrabiblical authorities in theological reflection and formulation.³¹ To affirm the primacy of Scripture is not something that is typical or restricted to Protestants. The Roman Catholic Church also affirms the primacy of Scripture for their faith.³² Roman Catholic theology affirms the divine inspiration of Scripture and also the historical primacy of Scripture over against later historical developments. But to affirm the primacy of Scripture is not the same as to affirm *sola Scriptura* where Scripture is the final and highest authority for faith and practice and the sole source of its own exposition. It is this Scripture principle that has become so characteristic of the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century.³³ To better understand the role of Scripture as *prima Scriptura* in the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and the crucial difference between *prima Scriptura* and *sola Scriptura*, we will briefly compare and contrast the two.

Prima Scriptura versus Sola Scriptura

Prima Scriptura expresses the idea that the canon of Scripture is the first or primary way in which God's revelation comes to us. *Prima Scriptura* conveys the thought that Scripture is merely the first among other sources that play an instrumental role in theology. In *prima Scriptura*, the Bible is seen as authoritative but it leaves the door open for other (authoritative) sources in theology that illumine and shape the interpretation of Scripture. While Scripture holds a place of primacy in *prima Scriptura*, under this rubric it becomes one of several sources that rule our faith and practice.

The Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, on the other hand, affirms more than the primacy of Scripture. It also includes the sufficiency of Scripture as the only source by which all other sources of theology are judged

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in matters of faith and practice in the church. Thus, Scripture alone is the arbiter by which everything else in theology is measured and decided. *Sola Scriptura* implies that Scripture alone (1) “is the uniquely infallible source of divine revelation that is available to contemporary humans collectively; (2) Scripture alone provides a sufficient and fully trustworthy basis of theology; and (3) Scripture is the uniquely authoritative and final norm of theological interpretation that norms all others.”³⁴ As such, *sola Scriptura* entails the concept of *tota Scriptura*, where all of Scripture functions as the infallible source of divine revelation and the final norm of theology. It also affirms the unity of Scripture, which implies that Scripture is internally coherent and allows us to interpret Scripture with Scripture (*analogia Scriptura*). Without a unity of Scripture, we could not distinguish between truth and error or oppose theological heresy, but would be left with conflicting and contradictory voices in Scripture that reflect inconsistent theological positions that cannot sustain theological and biblical unity. *Sola Scriptura* also implies the clarity of Scripture (*claritas Scriptura*), without which Scripture could not be understood clearly in what it affirms.³⁵

Sola Scriptura does not mean *solo Scriptura*. The principle of “the Bible alone” (*sola Scriptura*) does not exclude other sources besides Scripture, such as tradition, reason, and experience, but “all additional knowledge, experience, or revelation must build upon and remain faithful to the all-sufficient foundation of Scripture.”³⁶ This means that all other sources in theology are judged by Scripture and are subservient to Scripture. The Bible norms all other theological sources. The appeal to *sola Scriptura*, therefore, acknowledges the unique, divine authority of Scripture. The *sola* has to do with the exclusion of rivals and is intended to safeguard the final authority of Scripture from its dependence on the church and its tradition, on human reason,³⁷ and human experience. This means that the standard of its interpretation should not come from outside of Scripture, but rather from Scripture itself, which is the sole source of its own exposition.

***Sola Scriptura* and the Self-Interpretation of Scripture**

The self-interpretation of Scripture is expressed in such formulas as “*scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpret*” (“holy Scripture is its own interpreter”), “*Scripturam ex Scriptura explicandam esse*” (“Scripture is explained through Scripture”), and “*Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur*” (“Scripture interprets Scripture”).³⁸ Ellen G. White has confirmed the validity and importance of this *sola Scriptura* principle. In the introduction to the book *The Great Controversy* she writes, “The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer

of doctrines, and the test of experience.”³⁹ In a similar manner, Seventh-day Adventists affirm the authority of Scripture. Fundamental Belief 1 echoes White’s words and states,

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has communicated to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definite revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.⁴⁰

White describes this theological approach, where Scripture is the highest and final standard in theology, in the following words:

But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinion of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain “Thus saith the Lord” in its support.⁴¹

Does *Sola Scriptura* Work?

In stark contrast to such a high view of Scripture, some have claimed that a *sola Scriptura* approach is deficient in light of a “bewildering array of doctrinal options that have arisen among groups that strenuously profess fidelity to the Bible as their sole authority” and therefore a Quadrilateral alternative has been suggested⁴² as “the best way to begin the exodus out of this embarrassing, pluralistic impasse” that is deemed to be the result of *sola Scriptura*.⁴³

For critics of a *sola Scriptura* principle, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral seems to lead the way to an approach that affirms the primacy of Holy Scripture (*prima Scriptura*) vis-à-vis other sources of theology. One Methodist scholar has described the interplay of the different sources in theology in a *prima Scriptura* approach of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral as follows:

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The Scriptures are, in this view, the primal font of Christian truth. But since they must be interpreted in every succeeding age in each new cultural context, there is also a need for the positive aid of *tradition*, understood as the collective wisdom of the Christian community in all centuries and all communions. Such interpretations, however, must also be guided by *reason*. Wesley expressly excludes interpretations that lead either to logical absurdities or to indictments of God's goodness. This is a demand for clarity and cogency in all Christian formulations. None of this, however, will suffice until all are given life and power by "the inner witness of the Spirit that we are the children of God". This is the Christian *experience* that turns sound doctrine into living faith.⁴⁴

Such a theological methodology, however, poses its own set of problems. When Scripture is in need of the positive aid of tradition, it is no longer Scripture alone that is allowed to interpret Scripture. This is reminiscent of the Roman Catholic position, where Scripture is interpreted through the lens of tradition.⁴⁵ One also has to recognize that the so-called "collective wisdom of the Christian community in all centuries and all communions" is not as monolithic and uniform as it is claimed to be. Addressing the new emphasis on the importance of tradition in the relationship between Scripture and tradition in recent theology, John Peckham raises the important question: which of the traditions and which communities should be chosen?⁴⁶ Vincent of Lerin's famous rule of faith, "What has been believed everywhere, always, and by all,"⁴⁷ is historically not as uniform and harmonious as it is claimed to be in the Roman Catholic tradition.⁴⁸ Furthermore, when Scripture remains only the primary source, it no longer plays an exclusive role where Scripture alone is the decisive authority. If Scripture is only the *prima donna* in the choir, its role is "not there to pontificate, but to work in complementary fashion."⁴⁹ This means that with the *prima Scriptura* approach in the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, "the Bible is given greater freedom to be a powerful witness to the truths that give it redemptive sufficiency, not mere scientific or historic accuracy."⁵⁰ This, however, undermines the full trustworthiness of Scripture and ignores the numerous interplay between history and theology in Scripture.⁵¹

The plurality of different doctrinal opinions, bemoaned by some, ignores the fact that there is also considerable unity in the understanding of biblical truth across denominational boundaries. Theological pluralism is not the fault of Scripture or a deficiency of the *sola Scriptura* principle, but has to do with different

hermeneutical approaches that significantly influence the interpretation of Scripture,⁵² and also to a large degree with the presuppositions with which interpreters approach Scripture.⁵³ This leads us to another important factor in the discussion of the role of Scripture in the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

The Formal and Material Authority of Scripture

In Protestant theology, there is an important distinction between the *formal* and the *material* authority of Scripture. The Reformation slogan *sola Scriptura*—"by Scripture alone"—is often described as the "formal principle" of the Reformation,⁵⁴ identifying the authoritative source of Christian theology in Scripture.⁵⁵ In contrast to the formal principle, theologians also refer to the so-called "material principle,"⁵⁶ which denotes a central teaching of a religious text, such as *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, the gospel, or even Jesus Christ. This material principle often becomes the authentic center from which Scripture must be understood. In order to better understand the significance and problematic nature of this distinction, we need to briefly look to Martin Luther, who pioneered this thinking, before we turn to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and its influence there.

While Luther affirms the inspiration of Scripture, for him the content of Scripture is Christ and, from this fact, he seems to repeatedly also derive Scripture's authority. This means that for Luther, Christ is at once the center of Scripture and the Lord of Scripture. If Scripture is queen, Christ is King—even over Scripture itself. For Luther, it is Christ and the gospel of justification by faith alone, to which Scripture attests, that constitutes the *center* of Scripture and thus ultimately its final authority. Here Luther's famous preface to the epistle of James comes to mind, where he claims that whatever does not point to Christ or draws out Christ (in German: *was Christum treibet*) is not apostolic, even though Peter or Paul would teach it. On the other hand, whatever "drives home" Christ is apostolic, even though it would come from Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod.⁵⁷ Thus, for Luther, the *content* of Scripture (or the material principle) is Christ, and from this fact, he seems to repeatedly derive Scripture's authority. All Scripture revolves around Christ as its authentic center. Thus, Luther actually contended not "for the primacy of Scripture in the strict sense, but for the primacy of the gospel to which Scripture attests and hence for the primacy of Scripture as the attestation to the gospel."⁵⁸ Luther valued the Bible "because it is the cradle that holds Christ. For this reason, the gospel of justification by grace through faith served as Luther's hermeneutical key to Scripture."⁵⁹ According to Luther, Scripture must be understood in favor of Christ, not against Him. One consequence of this Christological

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hermeneutic is that if Scripture does not refer to Christ, it must not be held to be true Scripture.⁶⁰ Thus, Luther's understanding of the gospel became the basis for determining the relative authority of the various canonical writings⁶¹ and turned into a "gospel-centered criticism of Scripture."⁶² Christ and Scripture can be set over against each other because Luther ultimately ranked first, the personal Word (Christ); second, the spoken Word (gospel); and third, the written Word (Scripture). According to renowned theologian Gerhard Ebeling, this distinction and ranking leads to a canon within the canon,⁶³ where Christ becomes the hermeneutical key to the proper understanding of Scripture.

This, however, compromises the strength of the Scripture principle, where Scripture is the sole source of its own exposition. For "if Scripture is interpreted either by a doctrinal center or by a tradition it is no longer Scripture that is interpreting itself—rather it is we who are interpreting Scripture by means of a doctrine or tradition, to which Scripture is, in practice, being subjected."⁶⁴ Thus, it is not surprising that Luther's Christological method "sharpened into a tool of theological criticism,"⁶⁵ where ultimately the interpreter becomes the judge and stands above Scripture. The irony of this theological criticism is that it is done in the name of Jesus Christ and the gospel.

In a similar manner, in the Wesleyan Quadrilateral the salvific message of Scripture is more important than the formal authority of the inspired Word of God. This leads some scholars to proclaim that even alleged errors of a scientific and historical nature⁶⁶ are not worrisome as long as the message of Scripture is heard. Rather than Scripture being an authority because of its divine inspiration, "for the Wesleyan-Quadrilateral style of theology, authority is inherent in the message. Let the message be heard and the medium will have its legitimate authority (and primacy). . . . Exposure to this message lends the Bible its confessional authority."⁶⁷ In this way, just as with Luther, the *material principle*—that is, its message—becomes more powerful than the *formal principle* of authority, Scripture.⁶⁸ Furthermore, "the fact, that tradition, experience, and reason are sources of theological authority and reflection in dynamic conjunction with Scripture necessarily keeps religious thinking open to the creativity of the Spirit and implies that the Spirit is not limited to the here and now."⁶⁹ This may sound attractive and open-minded, but it also opens the door to relativism and diminishes the final authority of Scripture in theological matters. The wisdom of White's words deserves to be heeded, as she writes,

Since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word. The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever

be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.⁷⁰

Conclusion

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a hermeneutical proposal that did not originate with John Wesley, but rather with Albert Outler in the late 1960s. Outler later regretted having used this terminology because it opened a Pandora's box of issues that often diminished the authoritative role of Scripture in its interplay with tradition, reason, and experience. At its best, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral promotes the *primacy* of Scripture over against other sources of theology. But the primacy of Scripture often leads to a point where other sources are invoked to help interpret Scripture, thus diminishing Scripture's ability to interpret itself. Another aspect that weakens the formal principle of authority of Scripture in the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is the use of the material principle of Scripture, where the message of Scripture becomes more powerful and the decisive factor for the interpretation of Scripture.

The *sola Scriptura* principle, which affirms that Scripture is the sole source for its own exposition, is more than upholding the primacy of Scripture. *Sola Scriptura* includes the sufficiency, unity, and clarity of Scripture for the task of theology. In the *sola Scriptura* approach, other sources in theology are not negated; *sola Scriptura* is not *solo Scriptura*. Rather, *sola Scriptura* indicates that Scripture is not contingent on any other source and, as the highest and final authority in theology, excludes any rivals. The words of Scripture are allowed to interpret themselves. Scripture is not dependent on other external sources for its interpretation, but stands over and above them. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is not a way forward that should be followed and is fraught with numerous problems, ultimately diminishing the clarion role of Scripture as the ultimate authority in matters of faith and practice.



Frank M. Hasel
Associate Director of the
Biblical Research Institute

Endnotes

1 John H. Leith, "The Bible and Theology," *Interpretation* 30 (1976): 227, categorically states that "Christian theology has always been done 'in accordance with Scripture,'" although he adds that "the role of Scripture in the theological task . . . has rarely been spelled out in a precise way." On the different uses of Scripture in theology, see David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975); Kenneth Hagen, ed., *The Bible in the Churches: How Different Christians Interpret the Scriptures* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1985); Donald K. McKim, *What Christians Believe About the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1985); Robert K. Johnston, ed., *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985); Klaus Reinhardt, *Der dogmatische Schriftgebrauch in der katholischen und protestantischen Christologie von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1970); Avery Dulles, "Scripture: Recent Protestant and Catholic Views," *Theology Today* 37, no. 1 (1980): 7–26; and Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1992), 69–85.

2 Gerhard Ebeling, "Church History Is the History of the Exposition of Scripture," in *The Word of God and Tradition: Historical Studies Interpreting the Divisions of Christianity*, trans. S. H. Hooke (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1968), 11–31. This seems to be true especially in Protestantism.

3 Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 221.

4 James I. Packer, "'Sola Scriptura' in History and Today," in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 44.

5 Markus Barth, "Sola Scriptura," in *Scripture and Ecumenism: Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1965), 75. Similarly, Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 77, who writes that the central question is: "By what unimpeachable standard is Christian faith to be evaluated? What is our central criterion of judgement? The answer is *sola Scriptura*, which in the ablative case, means 'by Scripture alone.' This password of the Reformation conveys the idea of means or agency. That is, by the light of Scripture alone we are to judge all things and 'hold fast to what is good.'"

6 On the meaning of the term "source," see the discussion in Gerhard Ebeling, *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, 3 vols. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1979), 1:24–25, 35–42; and from an older Wesleyan perspective, John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York, NY: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), 1:7–22. Culture is also an influential factor that impacts theology, but for the purposes of this short article we will limit ourselves to the four major sources—Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience—because they are instrumental in what has become known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

7 For a concise discussion of these important factors in theology, see Frank M. Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D. G. Bloesch: An Investigation and Assessment of its Origin, Nature, and Use* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996), 21–94.

8 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1892), speaks about those four sources. For a short analysis of White's use of these sources vis-à-vis John Wesley's theology, see Alberto R. Timm, *A Short Analysis of the Book Steps to Christ in the Light of John Wesley's Theology* (unpublished paper, n.p. and n.d.). On the relationship between Scripture and experience in the interaction of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, see Alberto Timm, "Scripture and Experience," in *Reflections: The BRI Newsletter* 26 (April 2009): 4–7.

9 Woodrow W. Whidden, "Sola Scriptura, Inerrantist Fundamentalism, and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Is 'No Creed but the Bible' a Workable Solution?" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 35, no. 2 (1997): 211.

10 "Quadrilateral" comes from the Latin *quadri*, meaning "four," and *latus*, meaning "sides." Thus, it describes a four-sided polygon. See Wikipedia, s.v. "Quadrilateral," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quadrilateral> (accessed March 23, 2024).

11 Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 21.

12 Howard A. Snyder, "The Babylonian Captivity of Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 39, no. 1 (2004): 6–12, speaks about a Wes-

leyan Pentalateral, where a fifth source for theology is added: creation's created order.

13 *The United Methodist Church Book of Discipline* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon 1997), 77.

14 Thomas H. McCall, "Wesleyan Theology and the Authority of Scripture: Historic Affirmations and Some Contemporary Issues," in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 180.

15 Outler has been called "one of the greatest Methodist historians and theologians" (Ben Witherington III, *Sola Scriptura: Scripture's Final Authority in the Modern World* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023], 124).

16 Thorsen, 21.

17 On the Lambeth Quadrilateral, see "Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral" (adopted by the House of Bishops Chicago, 1886), <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/109011/Chicago-Lambeth-Quadrilateral.pdf> (accessed March 4, 2024). On the historical background of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, see Thorsen, 21–24, whom we follow closely.

18 Richard Hooker, a sixteenth-century Anglican priest and one of the major architects of the early Church of England, said theology was derived from a combination of Scripture, tradition, and reason. This has since become known as the "three-legged stool of Anglicanism." John Wesley was an Anglican priest, and it is highly likely that he was familiar with this formula and expanded it to four points, adding experience. It has been pointed out recently, however, that Wesley's theology is not simply a development of the "Anglican triad." While Hooker was one of the foremost Anglican theologians of his time, there were other divines of this period, like John Jewel (1522–1571) and Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603), who also were influential figures in theology. The "difference of emphasis would develop, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, into three distinctive approaches to Anglican theology: that of the Caroline Divines, the Puritans, and the latitudinarians" (Pratt Morris-Chapman, "Is the 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral' an Accurate Portrayal of Wesley's Theological Method?," *Theology and Ministry* 5 [2018]: 3). Thus, "the way in which Wesley utilized the different sources of revelation was influenced by the different parties within Anglicanism" (*ibid.*, 14).

19 Alan K. Waltz, *A Dictionary for United Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991), 191.

20 Jonathan Andersen, "The Myth of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral," <http://www.jonathanandersen.com/the-myth-of-the-wesleyan-quadrilateral/> (accessed March 5, 2024).

21 William J. Abraham is among the strongest critics of the notion of a "Quadrilateral." See William J. Abraham, *Waking From Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of a Doctrine in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), 56–65. The use of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral may have been a serious factor in the United Methodist Church's liberalism, which forced the conservative wing to leave the United Methodist Church and form the Global Methodist Church.

22 Andersen.

23 Thorsen, 21.

24 Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (1985): 16.

25 Thorsen, 71.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 46, emphasis original.

28 Thorsen, 71.

29 *United Methodist Church Book of Discipline*, 77.

30 Witherington, 124.

31 Thorsen, 74.

32 See the discussion in the section *Dei Verbum* in Walter M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II* (Piscataway, NJ: New Century, 1966), 111–121. See also Ronald D. Witherup, *Scripture: Dei Verbum* (Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006); and Witherup, *The Word of God at Vatican II: Exploring Dei Verbum* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

33 Chillingworth, one of the English Reformers, pinpointed the pivotal role of Scripture for Protestants when he said, "The Bible, I say the Bible only, is the religion of the Protestants" (W. Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants a Safe Way of Salvation* [1687; repr. London: Thomas Tegg, 1845], 460–461).

34 John C. Peckham, *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 141.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral and Sola Scriptura

35 On the clarity of Scripture, see Friedrich Beisser, *Claritas Scripturae bei Martin Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966); and Bernhard Rothen, *Die Klarheit der Schrift: Martin Luther. Die wiederentdeckten Grundlagen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990).

36 Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, Commentary Reference Series 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 61.

37 Frank M. Hasel, "Elements of Biblical Hermeneutics in Harmony with Scripture's Self-Claims," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach*, ed. Frank M. Hasel (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2020), writes, "As Christians we are not asked to give up our thinking. Our ability to think is given to us by God as a talent to be used. But the decisive issue is that as believers we are called to do our thinking properly, *coram deo*—that is, as someone who stands responsibly before God. Biblically speaking, we are called to think in relationship with God and in harmony with His Word."

38 Cf. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally From Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 277. See also Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Bohlau, 1883–1983) 7, 97, 20–26. In a sermon in 1522 Luther confirms this principle when he says, "Also ist die schrift ir selbs ain aigen liecht. Das ist dann fein, wenn sich die schrift selbs ausslegt" (Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 10, III, 238, 10–11).

39 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1950), iv.

40 General Conference Ministerial Department, *Fundamental Belief 1 in Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2018), 11.

41 White, *The Great Controversy*, 595.

42 Whidden, 214. See also Clark H. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1990), 43. Similar claims have been brought forth more recently by Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicalism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012); and Siegfried Zimmer, *Schadet die Bibelwissenschaft dem Glauben? Klärung eines Konflikts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

43 Whidden, 215.

44 M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985), 56–57.

45 See the discussion in the section *Dei Verbum* in Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, 111–121.

46 Peckham, 7–15, 73–108, 152.

47 Vincent of Lerin, "A General Rule for Distinguishing the Truth of the Catholic Faith From the Falsehood of Heretical Pravity," chap. 2 in *Commonitorium*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3506.htm> (accessed March 17, 2024)

48 See also the discussion in Peckham, 96–99.

49 Whidden, 218.

50 *Ibid.*, 222.

51 On the importance of history for biblical theology, see the thoughtful chapter by Michael G. Hasel, "History, the Bible, and Hermeneutics," in Hasel, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 105–130.

52 On some recent hermeneutical approaches, see Frank M. Hasel, "Recent Trends in Methods of Biblical Interpretation," in Hasel, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 405–461.

53 On the influence of presuppositions in the interpretation of Scripture, see Frank M. Hasel, "Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 27–46; and Kwabena Donkor, "Presuppositions in Hermeneutics," in Hasel, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 7–30.

54 Cf. Anthony N. S. Lane, "Sola Scriptura? Making Sense of a Post-Reformation Slogan," in *A Pathway Into the Holy Scripture*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 298.

55 Wikipedia, s.v. "Formal and Material Principles of Theology," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formal_and_material_principles_of_theology (accessed March 17, 2024).

56 Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought, From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 280, believed that the identification and application of these two categories (formal and material principles) originated in the nineteenth century. As early as 1845, the Protestant theologian and historian Philip Schaff discussed them in *The Principle of Protestantism as Related to the Present State of the Church*,

trans. John W. Nevin (Chambersburg, PA: Publication Office of the German Reformed Church, 1845), 54–94.

57 Martin Luther, *American Edition of Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia, PA, Concordia Publishing House, 1955–), 35, 396; and Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Deutsche Bibel* (Weimar: Bohlau, 1906–), 7, 385.

58 Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 57–58.

59 *Ibid.*, 58.

60 In his 1535 *Lectures on Galatians*, while replying to opponents who adduce biblical passages stressing works and merits, Luther stresses the following point: "You are stressing the servant, that is Scripture—and not all of it at that or even its most powerful part, but only a few passages concerning works. I leave this servant to you. I for my part stress the Lord, who is the King of Scripture" (Luther, *American Edition*, 26, 295; and Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 40, I, 459, 14–16). In the same year Luther again underscored Scripture's servant status relative to Christ when he wrote, "Briefly, Christ is Lord, not the servant, the Lord of the Sabbath, of law, and of all things. The Scriptures must be understood in favour of Christ, not against him. For that reason, they must either refer to him or must not be held to be true Scriptures. . . . Therefore, if the adversaries press the Scriptures against Christ, we urge Christ against the Scriptures. We have the Lord, they have the servants; we have the Head, they the feet or members, over which the head necessarily dominates and takes precedence. If one of them had to be parted with, Christ or the law, the law would have to be let go, not Christ. For if we have Christ, we can easily establish laws and we shall judge all things rightly. Indeed, we would make new decalogues, as Paul does in all the epistles, and Peter, but above all Christ in the gospel" (Luther, *American Edition*, 34, 112, 40–53).

61 It is a well-known fact that Luther called the book of James "an epistle of straw"—meaning it is an empty, useless, worthless epistle—because he could not find Christ and the gospel of justification by faith alone in the book of James with his emphasis on the importance of works. See Martin Luther, "Preface to the New Testament," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy Lull (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989), 117.

62 Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966), 81.

63 Gerhard Ebeling, "'Sola Scriptura' and Tradition," in *The Word of God and Tradition: Historical Studies Interpreting the Divisions of Christianity*, by Gerhard Ebeling, trans. S. H. Hooke (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1968), 118.

64 Brian Gaybba, *The Tradition: An Ecumenical Breakthrough?* (Rome: Herder, 1971), 221. For further discussion about a Christological center of Scripture, see Frank M. Hasel, "Recent Trends in Methods of Biblical Interpretation," in Hasel, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 449–456.

65 Werner Georg Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. S. McLean Gilmour and Howard C. Kee (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1972), 24.

66 Whidden, 221.

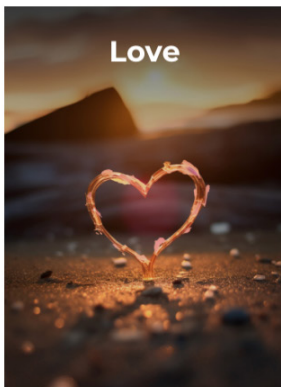
67 *Ibid.*, 222.

68 See *ibid.*, 223.

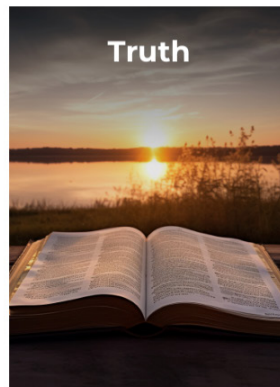
69 Paul Basset, "The Holiness Movement and the Protestant Principle," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 18 (Spring 1983), 21.

70 White, *The Great Controversy*, iv.

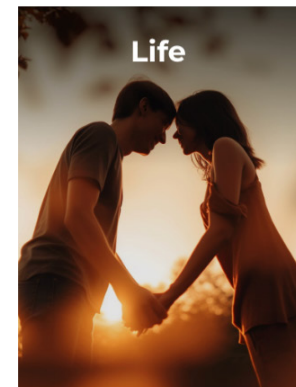




In this section, explore the biblical meaning of true love in its different dimensions and as expressed in human sexuality.



This section provides articles on what the Bible, the source of truth, says on the topic of human sexuality.



In this section, explore articles addressing practical aspects of human sexuality that lead to an abundant life.

New Human Sexuality Website Provides Bible-Based Resources

Audrey Andersson and Gina Wahlen

The subject of human sexuality has, in recent years, come to the forefront of discourse in society and within the church as questions have been raised regarding this fundamental issue of life. In addressing these questions, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has, as its practice, turned to the Bible for solid answers.

Over the years, the Church has issued a number of statements and guidelines addressing various aspects of human sexuality, including: birth control, child sexual abuse, homosexuality, marriage, meeting the challenges of STDs, pornography, responding to changing cultural attitudes regarding homosexual and other alternative

sexual practices, sexual behavior, same-sex unions, and transgenderism.¹

More recently, the General Conference established the Human Sexuality Taskforce in an effort to help local and global church leaders address a wide range of topics that are impacting local churches and their communities and address ongoing conversations surrounding issues and questions related to sexuality, both in churches and online.

The taskforce is focused on creating relevant resources that provide Christians with useful materials based on the Word of God. A first step in this effort was

Human Sexuality Website Provides Bible-Based Resources



Here you will find a growing number of videos featuring engaging panel discussions, biblically-based sermons, practical interviews, and more. All address human sexuality issues with compassion and clarity.



This section features recommended reading for all ages, addressing various aspects of human sexuality from a compassionate, biblical, and practical aspect. Check back often as the list continues to grow.



The Seventh-day Adventist Church takes seriously what the Bible says regarding human sexuality. Here you will find a number of biblically-based official statements, guidelines, and documents on various aspects of human sexuality.

the launching of the Human Sexuality website at [humansexuality.org](https://www.humansexuality.org).

The website, launched on December 6, 2023, features a thoughtful exploration of human sexuality through three distinct categories: Love, Truth, and Life. It aims to guide readers through examining God's love and the principles outlined in the Bible regarding human sexuality while providing practical insights for application in daily life.

The "Love" section underscores the role of God's love in the creation of the world and its ongoing influence on understanding human relationships. "Truth" takes a theological approach to human sexuality, featuring articles by notable Adventist theologians and leaders, offering biblically sound examinations of texts and questions often misunderstood or misused. The "Life" category emphasizes the abundant life through Jesus and aims to guide readers toward practical applications to real-life struggles and issues. A question-and-answer section is provided for answering submitted questions related to human sexuality.

One of the most popular pages of the website is the "Stories" section, featuring engaging personal stories, offering insights into the real-life experiences of individuals navigating their sexuality

Endnotes

¹These and more may be found at "Official Statements," Seventh-day Adventist Church, <https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/> (accessed March 11, 2024); and "Seventh-day Adventist Guidelines for Navigating High-Impact Topics and Situations," Seventh-day Adventist Church, <https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/guidelines/> (accessed March 11, 2024).

within the framework of their faith. The testimonies are provided to inform our understanding and learning through the challenges others have navigated.

A growing and robust resources section features videos, articles, book recommendations, and more, providing practical information within a biblical framework. To ensure the site remains current and reflective of contemporary discussions, the Human Sexuality Taskforce is committed to making regular updates, addressing submitted questions, and adding to the site's growing resource list.

The website is a developing resource that will continue to grow with the dynamic and complex topic it addresses, and the taskforce is open to receiving suggestions for future material on the website. Content is peer-reviewed before being uploaded to the site.

With the increased focus on supporting those seeking to learn what the Bible says as they navigate the questions they are asking, the Adventist Church and the Human Sexuality Taskforce invite all to read and use the provided resources to better comprehend human sexuality through the biblical lens of love, truth, and life.

Audrey Andersson
General Conference
Vice President,
Human Sexuality
Taskforce Chair



Gina Wahlen
Editor,
[humansexuality.org](https://www.humansexuality.org)



Lessons from Matthew 26

Clinton Wahlen

Matthew 26 opens with a fourth prediction by Jesus of His impending death—one not found in the other Gospels and which explicitly connects the event with the Passover (Matt 26:1–2). The fulfillment of the prediction will be narrated in the next chapter, when Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified (27:24–26). Chapter 26 describes in rapid succession the plot to seize Jesus (26:3–5), His anointing at Bethany (26:6–13), Judas’ agreement to betray Him (26:14–16), preparations for and celebration of the Last Supper (26:17–30), the prediction of Peter’s denial and the disciples’ protestations of loyalty (26:31–35), Jesus’ prayer and arrest in Gethsemane resulting in His abandonment by the disciples (26:36–56), and His trial before the Sanhedrin (26:57–68). The chapter closes with Peter’s denial of Jesus three times (26:69–75).

Interpretation of Matthew 26

1. Verses 1–5, the Plot to Seize Jesus

- In the final discourse, spoken privately to the disciples on the Mount of Olives, Jesus had been describing the Son of Man’s glorious appearing and the future kingdom. Now He snaps their attention back to the crisis they are about to face.
- Two days before Passover is apparently late on Tuesday evening, the beginning of Nisan 12 of the Jewish calendar.¹ Jesus links His approaching death to the Passover and the Paschal sacrifice, implicitly indicating its approaching fulfillment (Matt 1:21; cf. John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7).
- Jesus’ future reference to being “delivered up” is a present tense in Greek, stressing that it will certainly happen.² Throughout this chapter, the point is made that Christ’s suffering and death fulfill prophecy (Matt 26:24, 31, 54, 56), indicating Jesus is following God’s plan for saving human beings.
- In the time of Jesus, the Romans appointed the high priest. Valerius Gratus selected Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas. Apparently Caiaphas was politically savvy in maintaining good relations with the Roman officials inasmuch as he served longer than any other first-century high priest, from AD 18 to 36. The chief priests and elders gather at his palatial residence to discuss how to stop Jesus.
- The Jewish leaders sought a quick, secret trial to secure Jesus’ condemnation before the Passover and the week-long celebration of Unleavened

Bread. Otherwise their murderous design might be thwarted yet again due to His large, sympathetic following (cf. Matt 21:26).

2. Verses 6–16, the Anointing at Bethany and Jesus’ Betrayal by Judas

- The anointing in Bethany took place “six days before the Passover” (John 12:1), which was the previous Saturday night, but both Matthew and Mark have a topical sequence, placing it here in order to connect it more closely with the events of Jesus’ suffering and death (cf. Matt 26:12). Anointing Jesus’ head, a custom sometimes done to honor important guests, alludes to Jesus’ messianic role as King of Israel (cf. 1 Sam 10:1; 16:13; 2 Kgs 9:3, 6).
- The “very costly fragrant oil” is identified as spikenard by other Gospels with an estimated value of three hundred denarii (Mark 14:3; John 12:3), that is, about a year’s wages. Its strong fragrance would quickly be recognized as it was all poured out, not only on Jesus’ head but also on His feet (Luke 7:38; John 12:3).
- Led by Judas Iscariot (John 12:4–6), the disciples protested what appeared to them to be a great waste of resources that could instead have been sold to help the poor. But Jesus does not allow them to crush the woman’s act of devotion and commends her for doing “a good work for Me” (Matt 26:10).
- Their objection was met with the reminder that “you have the poor with you always” (cf. Deut 15:11), “but Me you do not have always” (Matt 26:11). More importantly, though, was the symbolic meaning that, just as the alabaster flask had to be broken to apply its precious contents, so Jesus’ body would soon be broken (v. 26), providing an infinite sacrifice for the salvation of human beings.
- Jesus also indicates its future connection with “wherever this gospel is preached” (v. 13), which is one reason, perhaps, that this story is recorded in all four Gospels. The worldwide extent of this proclamation is also predicted (cf. 24:14; 28:19).
- In contrast to the woman’s extravagant gift is the paltry sum Judas received for betrayal. We learn from Matthew that Judas took the initiative, it was the chief priests who count out the money, and the price of betrayal was “thirty pieces of silver.” This is the amount that was paid to Zechariah, whose work

as a shepherd was not valued (Zech 11:12–13)—a connection Matthew 27:9 draws explicitly.

3. Verses 17-30, Preparations for and Celebration of the Last Supper

- A significant amount of preparation was required to celebrate the Passover and the head of the household was responsible for organizing it. The disciples, as members of Jesus’ spiritual “family,” were given detailed instructions by Him.
- Wisely, neither the name of the man nor the exact location were disclosed to the Twelve, giving Judas no helpful information and leaving him “little time to lay plans for betraying Jesus to the leaders during the quiet hour He spent with His disciples in the upper room.”³ Thus, Jesus would have an uninterrupted time to impart some final teachings.
- In Matthew, Jesus’ message to the owner of the house where the Last Supper will be held includes, “My time is at hand,” referring to His imminent suffering and death (cf. Mark 14:41; John 12:23–24). This unnamed man apparently understood what these cryptic words meant even if the disciples did not.
- During the Last Supper, Jesus makes the surprising announcement to the Twelve that one of them will betray Him. He introduces this saying with “Assuredly,” which underscores the certainty of this prediction’s fulfillment.
- This leads “each” disciple to ask, “Surely not I, Lord?” (Matt 26:22, NAS95), hoping (as the Greek construction indicates) for a negative answer in response. Interestingly, Judas’ phrasing of the question betrays his unbelief. Refusing to call Jesus “Lord” as the other disciples had done, he asks, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” (v. 25, NAS95).
- In response to Judas, Jesus answers knowingly, “You have said it,” neither clearly confirming nor denying it, leaving the final decision up to Judas himself. No doubt the other disciples wondered about Judas at this point and he left soon afterward to do the deed (John 13:28–30).⁴
- Standard rituals were connected with the celebration of the Passover but Jesus seems to have given His own messianic interpretation of them. It was the transition from type and shadow symbolized by the Paschal lamb to fulfillment and reality seen in Jesus’ life and approaching death.
- The interpretation given by Jesus, rather than looking backward, predictively points to His death, resurrection, and the victorious supper celebration in His Father’s kingdom (Matt 26:26–29).
- Since this was a celebration of the Passover, the “bread of affliction” (Deut 16:3) would certainly be unleavened (Exod 12:15, 19–20). Jesus had earlier warned of “the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees,” which symbolized their false doctrine (Matt 16:12). Here the absence of leaven points to His pure, sinless sacrifice.
- Nowhere in the New Testament are the contents of “the cup” ever called “wine.” The only description of it is identical in all three Synoptic Gospels: the “fruit of the vine” (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18), fitting in view of Jesus’ likening His new covenant ministry to “new wine” in obvious contrast to old, fermented wine (Matt 9:17). The unfermented wine points to the power of Christ’s blood to cleanse from sin.
- Jesus ratified the covenant through His shed blood, providing in reality the release from the penalty of sin that the blood of the sacrifice symbolized in type (Exod 24:8; cf. Heb 9:20, 22). His words, “for many” (Matt 26:28) and reference to His blood being “poured out” allude to the work of the Suffering Servant who justifies many, pours out “his soul to death,” and bears “the sin of many” (Isa 53:11–12).⁵
- Jesus connects the new “wine” of the Lord’s Supper with “My Father’s kingdom” (Matt 26:29), pointing to the messianic banquet that His people will celebrate in heaven (Rev 19:7–8) and, ultimately, to the final restoration in the new earth (Rev 21:1–5). Until then, the Lord’s Supper is celebrated “in remembrance” of Christ’s death for us and in light of the future hope we have through faith “till He comes” (1 Cor 11:25–26).

4. Verses 31-35, Jesus’ Prediction of Peter’s Denial and the Disciples’ Protestation of Loyalty

- As they walk slowly from the upper room to the Mount of Olives (Matt 26:30), Jesus warns the disciples of their imminent spiritual danger: “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night” (v. 31). His quotation of Zechariah 13:7, that God would “strike the Shepherd,” alludes to His own death and, as a result, “the sheep of the flock” (the disciples, Matt 25:32; cf. Isa 53:6) would be “scattered.” Nevertheless, Jesus repeatedly includes a word of hope, pointing beyond His sufferings and death to their eventual meeting in Galilee (Matt 26:32).
- Immediately, Peter emphatically rejects Jesus’ prediction that all the disciples would “stumble,” absolutely insisting that he would not but would remain faithful. Jesus, unimpressed by this self-confident boast, emphasizes the truthfulness and absolute trustworthiness of an even more startling prediction, that “before the rooster crows” Peter would deny Him three times (v. 34).
- Amazingly, Peter doubles down on his feeble promise in the strongest possible way: “Even if I must die

with You, never will I deny You” (v. 35, author’s translation). And the others followed Peter’s lead despite being no more ready for what was to come.

5. Verses 36–56, Jesus’ Prayer and Arrest in Gethsemane and His Abandonment by the Disciples

- The location of Gethsemane (meaning “oil press”) is uncertain but seems to refer to a place used to make olive oil. John calls it a “garden,” indicating it was an area used for cultivation (John 18:1, 26), so it may designate an olive grove on the Mount of Olives just east of Jerusalem.
- Jesus has most of the disciples sit down while He takes Peter, James, and John deeper into the garden with Him to pray. The same three who saw Him transfigured and indicated their willingness to share His suffering (Matt 20:22; 26:35) are now to witness His agony.
- He is described as “deeply distressed” (Matt 26:37), “troubled” (ESV), “grieved and agitated” (NRSV). Jesus expresses that He is “exceedingly sorrowful,” the same Greek word used to describe David’s experience (LXX Ps 41:6, 12 [ET 42:5, 11]; 42:5 [ET 43:5]). The separation from His Father was so intense that He felt near death.⁶
- In urging the three disciples to “watch and pray” (Matt 26:41; cf. v. 38), Jesus encourages them to be wide awake to their spiritual danger and to be companions with Him in prayer.
- Jesus’ prayer to “let this cup pass from Me” shows that He seeks another way forward rather than to drink the cup of God’s wrath against sin.⁷ Despite wanting the cup removed, Jesus, as always, submits His will to that of His Father, even though it means death on the cross (Phil 2:7–8).
- Judging from this first of three seasons of prayer (only Matthew records all three), one hour was not very long for Jesus to pray (Matt 14:23; cf. Luke 6:12). He urges the three disciples, even addressing Peter by name, to “watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation” (Matt 26:40–41), referring apparently to the urge they will feel to abandon Him and save themselves when the mob comes to arrest Him (v. 47).
- Jesus’ wording in verse 42—literally, “Let Your will be done”—echoes not only the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:10), but also the “Let there be” of creation week (LXX Gen 1:3, 6, 14).⁸ It indicates a settled submission to God’s will and a firm desire for it to be accomplished in His life.
- Jesus’ announcement that “the hour is at hand” sounds a note of urgency to rouse His sleepy disciples. He could hear the multitude approaching to arrest Him; His prophecy of being betrayed (Matt

26:21) is now coming to pass. His “hour” had come in fulfillment of prophecy.⁹ The grand purpose of His life was now to be fulfilled (John 12:27).

- Jesus’ reference to the mob as “sinners” is a reminder that, by rejecting the light of the gospel, people are left in spiritual darkness (Matt 4:16; John 3:19; 8:12; cf. 2 Cor 4:3–4).
- The multitude, sent by the religious leaders, probably included the temple guard but the mention of swords indicates Roman soldiers were present too—unsurprising since there was always a potential for trouble during a major Jewish feast, particularly the Passover. John 18:3, 12 mentions a “detachment of troops” (Gk. *speiran*), which refers to a Roman cohort of up to six hundred men (cf. Matt 27:27)¹⁰ that would have been stationed in the nearby temple complex.
- Judas’ use of a kiss to identify Jesus to the mob was a typical Jewish way of showing love among close friends and family and also used to greet a revered rabbi, but in reality revealed an appalling duplicity (cf. Prov 27:6). The response by Jesus, addressing Judas as “Friend” (Matt 26:50), shows caution and is used in Matthew only in a negative sense (Matt 20:13; 22:12). The question may be an attempt to prick Judas’ conscience.
- Had Jesus chosen to save Himself, He could have prayed and been supplied “with more than twelve legions of angels” (Matt 26:53), which amounts to more than seventy-two thousand. Actually, the large number of troops that came to arrest Jesus would be no match for even one angel, but this is a spiritual battle won by Jesus already in Gethsemane through prayerful submission to His Father’s will.
- The strongest possible form of command in Greek (“it must happen thus,” v. 54) underscores the unbreakable certainty of scriptural fulfillment (cf. John 10:35), which Jesus stresses also in His speech to the mob (v. 56). His reference specifically to “the prophets” points to the part of the Hebrew canon especially detailing His sufferings and death (e.g., Isa 53; Zech 12:10; 13:7). Matthew also records the fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction that “all” would stumble (Matt 26:31): “all the disciples forsook Him and fled” (v. 56).

6. Verses 57–68, Jesus’ Trial Before the Sanhedrin

- The scribes were experts in the law and the elders represented the leading families of Israel. Jesus was tried before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, which was tasked with deciding only the highest matters. Probably most of the seventy members were present since it was the Passover. Those who might impede

Lessons from Matthew 26

the proceedings (e.g., Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea) were doubtless not invited.

- Capital offenses were supposed to be tried during the day and a verdict was only supposed to be rendered after another day had intervened, but proceedings were rushed so as to be completed before the Passover.
- Despite false witnesses distorting His words, Jesus remained silent. He would “not quarrel nor cry out” (Matt 12:19) in fulfillment of prophecy (Isa 42:2; 53:7; cf. 1 Pet 2:23).
- Since Jesus refused to answer questions, Caiaphas adjures Him to answer under oath whether or not He is the Messiah. Should He refuse to answer He would violate a valid legal requirement, but denying He was the Messiah would be dishonest. Despite the ambiguity of Jesus’ response, the religious leaders considered Him a messianic pretender who merited the death penalty. Their preconceptions and unbelief precluded them from accepting the truth that He was, in fact, the Messiah.
- Jesus’ reference to the Son of Man’s “coming,” alluding to the heavenly judgment of Daniel 7:9–10, 13, reverses the situation and depicts Caiaphas and the entire Sanhedrin ultimately facing divine judgment.
- In response, Jesus is accused of blasphemy, which is associated in the Gospels with claiming prerogatives that belong only to God (Matt 9:3; Mark 2:8; Luke 5:21; John 10:30–33). The apparently unanimous verdict is pronounced against Jesus on this basis (Matt 26:66).

7. Verses 69–75, Peter’s Denial of Jesus Three Times

- Matthew sandwiches Peter’s denial of Jesus between the nighttime trial before the Sanhedrin and the daytime proceedings, narrating the three denials in quick succession.
- Peter’s denials progress rapidly from pretending not to understand, to denying with an oath that he even knows Jesus let alone had been with Him. Finally, when recognized by his speech as a Galilean, several men accuse him of “truly” being one of Jesus’ disciples, which Peter most emphatically denied with cursing and swearing—that is, by calling down a curse on himself should he be lying and swearing that he was telling the truth.
- The pivotal moment for Peter came when, following his third denial, he heard the rooster crow and remembered Jesus’ words and realized His prediction had been precisely fulfilled. Luke 22:61 adds, “the Lord turned and looked at Peter.” Unlike Judas, who persisted in the face of overwhelming evidence of Jesus’ supernatural knowledge of him, Peter “went

out and wept bitterly,” repenting with a sorrow that needed no repentance (2 Cor 7:10).

- Through heartfelt repentance, Peter found his way back to the right path and, just as he had denied Jesus three times, he was given the opportunity to reaffirm his love and commitment to the Lord three times (John 21:15–17).

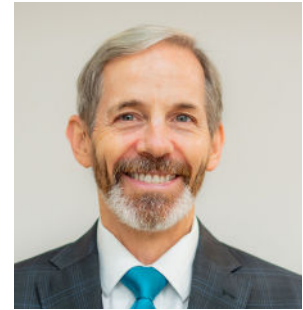
Application of the Chapter

Some important lessons we may glean from Matthew 26 include:

1. In place of the deliverance from bondage commemorated by the Passover, Jesus, by instituting the emblems of the Lord’s Supper, establishes the commemoration of the greater deliverance from sin accomplished by His death.
2. Just as Jesus’ giving to the disciples the emblems of the bread and the cup provided the opportunity for them to accept and personalize the messianic meaning of these elements, so participation in the communion service in obedience to Jesus’ command, “do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19), signifies one’s personal acceptance of Jesus’ death and resurrection and a public expression of faith that Jesus lives and is coming again (Matt 26:29).
3. Just as the disciples eating from the one communion bread and drinking from the one cup symbolized their unity as one spiritual family (Matt 26:26–27), the widespread Adventist practice of eating the communion bread together and drinking at the same time from the communion cup symbolizes our unity as a church family.
4. To “watch” means to be ready for danger (24:43) and alert against temptation (1 Pet 5:8). It is the opposite of “sleep,” which refers metaphorically to inattentiveness when spiritual vigilance is needed (Matt 25:5; 1 Thess 5:6; cf. Rom 13:11). The same admonition appears in connection with readiness for the second advent (24:42; 25:13; cf. Rev 16:15).
5. Jesus’ humble submission to His Father’s will is a lesson and an example for us to surrender our life to God’s will day by day (cf. Matt 16:24–25).
6. Jesus’ sympathetic words regarding His sleepy disciples, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:41), is more generally applicable in our own battle with temptation. It is also a warning not to allow human weakness to conquer by trusting to one’s own strength. Spiritual battles cannot be won with carnal weapons (2 Cor 10:4–6) but, by persevering in prayer and reaching heavenward for divine power, deliverance from temptation is certain (Matt 6:13; cf. 1 Cor 10:13; 2 Pet 2:9).

Lessons from Matthew 26

7. Jesus never condoned violence, as the warning “All who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt 26:52) underscores. Rather, He taught His followers to “Love your enemies” (Matt 5:44). Violence only begets more violence. Rather than “Might makes right,” Jesus’ example shows that “Right makes might.” Similarly, God’s last-day remnant are warned against using violent means to defend themselves (Rev 13:10) and are to show the same patient endurance and faith exemplified by Jesus (Rev 14:12).
8. Jesus’ silence toward His accusers denied them the opportunity to further twist His words or use them against Him. Similarly in legal proceedings today, the best self-defense is silence and the right to remain silent is recognized in many countries around the world.
9. Peter’s progressive denial of Jesus and descent into deceit and demoralization illustrate that each wrong step prepares the way for another, more serious, misstep, and that it is always better to turn back from a wrong path than to pursue it further in hopes it may improve.



Clinton Wahlen

Associate Director of the
Biblical Research Institute

Endnotes

1 “Maps and Charts Illustrating the Life and Ministry of Jesus,” in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol, 7 vols. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980), 5:233.

2 See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 535–536.

3 Nichol, 5:520.

4 Cf. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 654–655: “Until this step was taken, Judas had not passed beyond the possibility of repentance. But when he left the presence of his Lord and his fellow disciples, the final decision had been made. He had passed the boundary line.”

5 Cf. Clinton Wahlen, “Lessons From Matthew 20,” *Reflections* 79 (July–September 2022): 15 (commenting on Matt 20:28). The verb “pour out” (Gk. *enchunō*, a variant form of *encheō*) appears in sacrificial contexts (Lev 4:7; 8:15; 9:9; Isa 57:6; cf. Ps 22:14; Zech 12:10).

6 Cf. White, 686: Jesus “felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father. The gulf was so broad, so black, so deep, that His spirit shuddered before it. This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequences of man’s sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression.”

7 The cup metaphor symbolizes God’s judgment against sin (e.g., Ps 75:8; Isa 51:17, 22; Jer 25:15–28; Ezek 23:31–34; Rev 14:9–10; 16:19; 18:6).

8 See Clinton Wahlen, “Matthew and the Genesis Creation,” in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the New Testament*, ed. Thomas R. Shepherd (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2022), 169.

9 The Greek word *ēngiken* (“at hand”), used twice here (vv. 45–46), signals also the fulfillment of prophetic expectations in connection with the proclamation that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7).

10 Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 936.



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Kwabena Donkor

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Kwabena Donkor, Ph.D., served as an Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute at the World Headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for seventeen years before he retired in 2021.

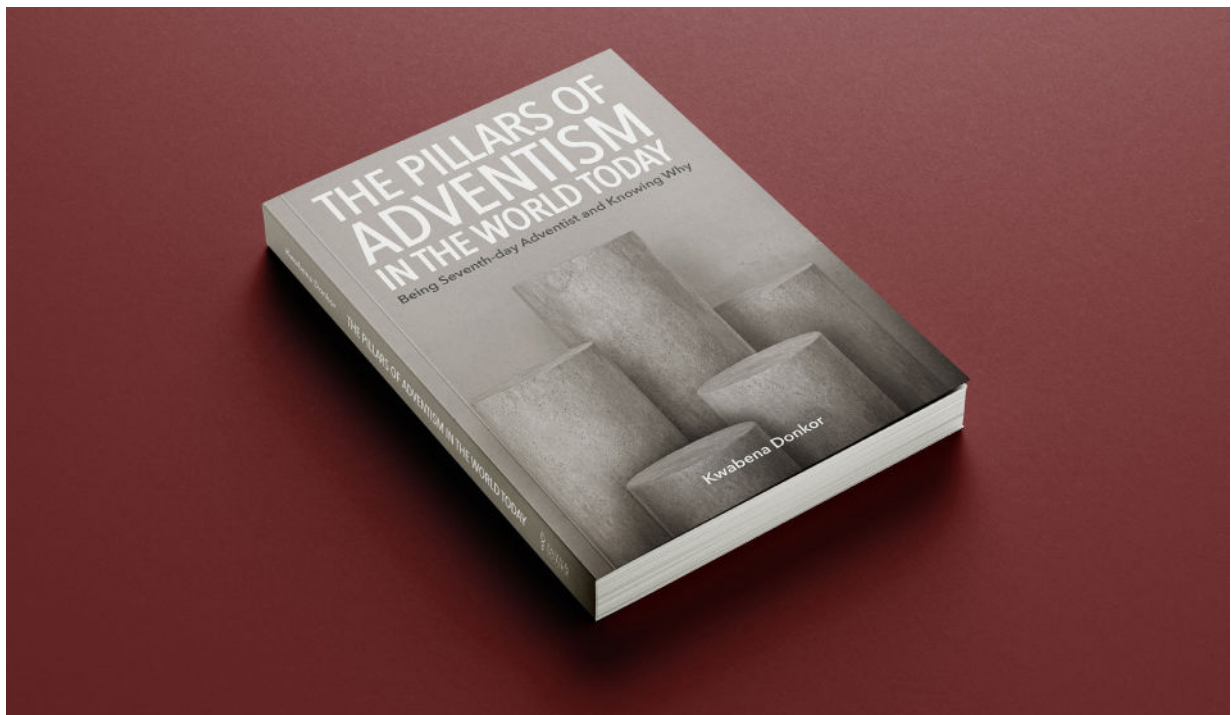
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Kwabena Donkor.

Review and Herald Publishing Association

Silver Spring, MD, 2024

253 pp.



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Editorial Committee:

Elias Brasil de Souza, Clinton Wahlen,
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Biblical Research Institute

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®

12501 Old Columbia Pike

Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA

Phone: 301.680.6790

Fax: 301.680.6788

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