THE MISSING ELEMENT

If the Bible is the word of God, and God’s word is powerful, then how is it that there are Bible scholars who profess atheism? If Jesus saves all those who call upon His name, then how is it that there are Christians who will go to hell? If the Sabbath is a day of rest, then how is it that there are stressed-out Sabbath keepers?

Apparently, merely having access to the Bible, even with an understanding of its original language, is not sufficient to engender Christianity. Knowing enough about Jesus to profess following Him is insufficient to secure salvation. And ceasing from your secular labor every seventh day is not adequate to ensure that you are experiencing the rest that God intends for the Sabbath.

In all three scenarios, the missing ingredient is the element of faith. Hebrews 11:6 tells us, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him.” Because while salvation is the free gift of God’s grace, faith is necessary to access the salvation: “For by grace you have been saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8, emphasis supplied). In order to enter into true Sabbath rest, we need to exercise faith in the One who gives the rest: “We who have believed do enter that rest” (Heb. 4:3).
Write out Hebrews 4:1–11 from the Bible translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Hebrews 4:9, 10. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
SABBATH REST EVERY DAY

After Lot selfishly chose the well-watered, grassy plain of Jordan (Gen. 13:10, 11), God said to Abraham, “Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever” (Gen. 13:14, 15, KJV). This promise was literally and initially fulfilled when the Israelites, led by Joshua, conquered Canaan. The same promise will be ultimately fulfilled when the seed of Abraham (the redeemed) inherit the entire earth, “northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward” (Rom. 4:13; Gen. 13:14, KJV).

In a similar fashion, the promise of rest made by God to the landless, wandering Israelites extended beyond a weekly day of rest. The promise “I will give thee rest” (Exod. 33:14, KJV) embraced a lifestyle, not just a day—a life of total trust in God, of oneness with Him. It was based on faith in Christ, which is why “they could not enter in [into God’s rest] because of unbelief” (Heb. 3:19). They went through the motions of keeping the weekly Sabbath without experiencing “My rest” (Heb. 3:11, 18, 19; 4:3, 5).

Since God refers to this rest as “My rest,” it follows that it must be a divine gift. Any unbeliever can rest from his or her physical work; but only a believer can rest in God’s work (past, present, and future). But since man cannot do God’s work, it follows that man cannot rest from it. That rest must be gifted to him . . . by active faith! This faith the Israelites did not exercise, and consequently they did not enjoy the rest from God—not under Moses, nor under Joshua, nor in David’s time, nor in Paul’s time.

The Bible declares, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe” (Heb. 11:6, KJV). This is non-negotiable and was required in Adam’s time, and without even minimal dilution, is required today. There never was a time in the history of salvation when it was not required. The “must believe” command is strengthened by God’s oath that without it no one can enter His rest (Ps. 95:11; Heb. 3:11).

Quite possibly, there are thousands of Seventh-day Adventists who “keep the Sabbath” by resting from secular work but who never experience what God calls “My rest.” Even for those who, by faith, accept “My rest,” there still remains the very fullest expression of that rest: when the redeemed will rest eternally from temptation, from the consequences of sin, and from life in a decaying world. Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this comprehensive rest must be seen afar off and embraced by active faith . . . daily.

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God” (Heb. 4:9, KJV).

May the reader purpose in the heart daily to enter into that lifestyle rest “through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul.” (White, Faith and Works, 100.)
From God's view, an obedient life is the most blessed way to live (Deut. 28:1–14). The very basis of God's covenant with Israel was the Ten Commandments (Exod. 19:4–6). While this obedience is anchored in the Decalogue, it is expressed in all other commands of God, all of which in some way express the principles of the Ten Commandments. Some examples are (1) not oppressing the stranger (Exod. 22:21); (2) compassion for widows and orphans (Exod. 22:22); and (3) respecting church leaders (1 Tim. 5:19).

None will argue that in the wording of the fourth commandment, the “rest” requirement is dominant. To some, avoiding wage-earning activities on the seventh day is the essence of Sabbath observance. However, there are two other stated requirements (sub-commands) not usually stressed but deserving of closer scrutiny. They are “work” and “remember.” Whatever else the fourth commandment requires, it clearly calls believers to (1) remember, (2) work, and (3) rest. Absent the remembering, there can be no proper Sabbath rest. These three requirements seem to follow a logical order.

The Sabbath commandment is directly connected to a specific time in a way none of the other nine are. In “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19), pastors and Bible workers instruct baptismal candidates to rest on the seventh day after working six days. But no one is told when to remember! This neglect damages the spiritual aspect of Sabbath observance. As surely as the other nine commandments apply every day, the fourth commandment also has a daily application—in the area of remembering. As a principle, the Sabbath commandment must be remembered every day. Ellen White writes, “After the transgression of Adam the principles of the law were not changed, but were definitely arranged and expressed to meet man in his fallen condition.” (White, The Faith I Live By, 80.)

Each commandment is a verbal rendering of a principle. Principles are not time-bound. The Sabbath principle (recognition of and dependence upon the Creator) demands a moment-by-moment, day-by-day application or remembering. After all, the Ten Commandments are “the whole duty of man” (Eccles. 12:13, KJV). There can be no rest from this duty.

The temporal Sabbath day is once weekly; the spiritual Sabbath rest is daily. Sabbath keepers must be Sabbath keepers seven days a week!
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

James 2:14–26
Luke 8:42–48
Ezekiel 20:19, 20
Hebrews 11
Genesis 13:14–17

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with Hebrews 4:1–11?

Review your memorized verse from Hebrews 4:1–11.
THE FACTS OF FAITH

The King James Version states, “Without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6). Forty-four other translations express this precise thought! Hebrews 11:6 is inseparable from the idea that “the just shall live by faith” (Gal. 3:11). There is even a form of negative support in these words: “For whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23, KJV).

In salvation, faith is indispensable.

Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4, KJV). But Paul says, “Live by faith” (Gal. 3:11). There is no conflict, because faith exists where the word exists. The Bible says, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17, KJV). What word? “The word of faith” (Rom. 10:8). Faith and the word cannot be separated, because to live by faith is to live by the word! Salvation itself results from faith in the word.

The reader is now directed to creation. Scripture states, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made” (Ps. 33:6, KJV). The Psalmist fortifies this proposition thus: “For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9, KJV). Ellen White writes, “All things, material or spiritual, stood up before the Lord Jehovah at His voice.” (White, The Ministry of Healing (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 414.)

This has everything to do with Sabbath keeping. Sabbath keepers honor the Creator who created by His word and sustains creation by His word. True Sabbath keeping, therefore, is an act of faith in the word of God. Ultimately, this is faith in the Living Word, Jesus Christ, the Creator, who also saves by the word. True Sabbath-keeping is an expression of active faith in the word of God.
THE FAITH UNTO SALVATION

No other institution which was committed to the Jews tended so fully to distinguish them from surrounding nations as did the Sabbath. God designed that its observance should designate them as His worshipers. It was to be a token of their separation from idolatry, and their connection with the true God. But in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ. When the command was given to Israel, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” the Lord said also to them, “Ye shall be holy men unto Me.” Exodus 20:8; 22:31. Only thus could the Sabbath distinguish Israel as the worshipers of God.

As the Jews departed from God, and failed to make the righteousness of Christ their own by faith, the Sabbath lost its significance to them. Satan was seeking to exalt himself and to draw men away from Christ, and he worked to pervert the Sabbath, because it is the sign of the power of Christ. The Jewish leaders accomplished the will of Satan by surrounding God’s rest day with burdensome requirements. In the days of Christ the Sabbath had become so perverted that its observance reflected the character of selfish and arbitrary men rather than the character of the loving heavenly Father. The rabbis virtually represented God as giving laws which it was impossible for men to obey. They led the people to look upon God as a tyrant, and to think that the observance of the Sabbath, as He required it, made men hard-hearted and cruel. It was the work of Christ to clear away these misconceptions. Although the rabbis followed Him with merciless hostility, He did not even appear to conform to their requirements, but went straight forward, keeping the Sabbath according to the law of God. (White, The Desire of Ages (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 283, 284.)

To talk of religion in a casual way, to pray without soul hunger and living faith, avails nothing. A nominal faith in Christ, which accepts Him merely as the Saviour of the world, can never bring healing to the soul. The faith that is unto salvation is not a mere intellectual assent to the truth. He who waits for entire knowledge before he will exercise faith, cannot receive blessing from God. It is not enough to believe about Christ; we must believe in Him. The only faith that will benefit us is that which embraces Him as a personal Saviour; which appropriates His merits to ourselves. Many hold faith as an opinion. Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. Genuine faith is life. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power. (White, The Desire of Ages, 347.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What is the difference between knowing and knowing of or about something?

Which of the two do you use about the Sabbath? About Jesus? Why?

What is the role of faith in your answer to the questions above?

How is Sabbath rest more than just a day? How is it a lifestyle for you?

What is the difference between “day” rest and “lifestyle” rest?

How can you incorporate more of remembering, working, and resting?

How can Jesus help in your Sabbath remembrance?

How has the Sabbath become casual in our lives? Why?