

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ELLEN G. WHITE AND THE BIBLE

Compiled by Robert W. Olson

1. Our Fundamental Belief Statement, approved at Dallas, Texas, General Conference, 1980.

¶1. The Holy Scriptures

"The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12.)

¶17. The Gift of Prophecy

"One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10.)"--SDA Yearbook, 1984, pp. 5, 7.

2. Our Baptismal Vow:

"Do you accept the Biblical teaching of spiritual gifts, and do you believe that the gift of prophecy in the remnant church is one of the identifying marks of that church?"--Church Manual, p. 62.

3. What do we mean when we say that Ellen White is an "authoritative source of truth"? Ellen White, not the Bible, is the source of the following counsels. In each of these statements Ellen White is an "authoritative source of truth."

(a) "The health cannot be preserved unless some portion of each day is given to muscular exertion in the open air. Stated hours should be devoted to manual labor of some kind, anything which will call into action all parts of the body."--My Life Today, p. 44.

(b) "Brethren, when you take time to cultivate your garden, thus gaining the exercise needed to keep the system in good working order, you are just as much doing the work of God as in holding meetings.--Gospel Workers," p. 240.

(c) "Those whose habits are sedentary should, when the weather will permit, exercise in the open air every day, summer or winter. Walking is preferable to riding or driving, for it brings more of the muscles into exercise. The lungs are forced into healthy action, since it is impossible to walk briskly without inflating them."--Ministry of Healing, p. 240.

(d) "There is no exercise that can take the place of walking."--
3T 78.

4. Question: "Do Seventh-day Adventists regard the writings of Ellen G. White as on an equal plane with the writings of the Bible?" (Walter Martin, QOD 89.)

(a) "If the Bible should show the visions were not in harmony with it, the Bible would stand, and the visions would be given up."--G. I. Butler, RH Supplement, Aug. 14, 1883.

(b) "I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged."--EW 78.

(c) "In our time . . . there is need of a return to the great Protestant principle--the Bible and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty."--GC 204, 205.

(d) "We then took the position that the Bible, and the Bible only, was to be our guide; and we are never to depart from this position."--CW 145.

(e) "God will have a people on the earth to maintain the Bible and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines, and the basis of all reforms."--GC 595.

(f) "The Bible and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union."--ISM 416.

(g) "The Spirit was not given--nor can it ever be bestowed--to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."--GC vii.

(h) "Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light."--Ev 257.

(i) "The testimonies of Sister White should not be carried to the front. God's Word is the unerring standard. The testimonies are not to take the place of the Word."--Ev 256.

(j) "If you had made God's Word your study, with a desire to teach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection, you would not have needed the Testimonies. It is because you have neglected to acquaint yourselves with God's inspired Book that He has sought to reach you by simple, direct testimonies, calling your attention to the words of inspiration which you had neglected to obey, and urging you to fashion your lives in accordance with its pure and elevated teachings."--2T 605.

(k) "Brother J would confuse the mind by seeking to make it appear that the light God has given through the Testimonies is an addition to the Word of God, but in this he presents the matter in a false light. God has seen fit in this matter to bring the minds of His people to His Word, to

give them a clearer understanding of it. The Word of God is sufficient to enlighten the most beclouded mind and may be understood by those who have any desire to understand it."--5T 663.

(l) "The written testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed. . . . Additional truth is not brought out; but God has through the Testimonies simplified the great truths already given."--5T 665.

(m) "Your testimony is to come down to the minutiae of life, keeping the feeble faith from dying."--5T 667.

(n) "In public labor do not make prominent and quote that which Sister White has written as authority to sustain your positions. To do this will not increase faith in the testimonies. Bring your evidences, clear and plain from the Word of God. A thus saith the Lord is the strongest testimony you can possibly present to the people. Let none be educated to look to Sister White, but to the mighty God, who gives instruction to Sister White.

"The words given through the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, should be authority, and let all be educated to look to the divine Teacher."--Letter 11, 1894; MR No. 295.

5. Question: "Do you place her in the prophetic class with such men as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel?" (Walter Martin, QOD 89.)

(a) "During the ages while the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament were being given, the Holy Spirit did not cease to communicate light to individual minds, apart from the revelations to be embodied in the Sacred Canon. The Bible itself relates how, through the Holy Spirit, men received warning, reproof, counsel, and instruction, in matters in no way relating to the giving of the Scriptures. And mention is made of prophets in different ages, of whose utterances nothing is recorded. In like manner, after the close of the canon of the Scripture, the Holy Spirit was still to continue its work, to enlighten, warn, and comfort the children of God."--GC viii.

(b) Non-canonical prophets included Elijah, Elisha, Enoch, Nathan, Gad, Iddo, Agabus, John the Baptist, Hulda, Deborah, Miriam, and others. 1 Chron. 29:29; 2 Chron. 9:29.

(c) Note four points about Nathan: (1) He is called a prophet, (2) he wrote an inspired book, (3) his book is not included in the Bible, and (4) his authority was recognized by David, who was himself a canonical prophet.

(d) The non-canonical prophets, while not Bible writers, nevertheless spoke with divine authority. 2 Sam. 12:1-13; 1 Chron. 21:9-19.

(e) "Some have stumbled over the fact that I said I did not claim to be a prophet. . . . Early in my youth I was asked several times, Are you a prophet? I have ever responded, I am the Lord's messenger. I know that many have called me a prophet, but I have made no claim to this title. . . . Why have I not claimed to be a prophet? Because in these last days many who boldly claim that they are prophets are a reproach to the cause of Christ; and because my work includes much more than the word "prophet" signifies. . . . To claim to be a prophetess is something that I have never done. If others call me by that name, I have no controversy with them. But my work has covered so many lines that I cannot call myself other than a messenger."--RH July 26, 1906; 1SM 31, 32, 34.

(f) "My commission embraces the work of a prophet, but it does not end there."--1SM 36.

(g) "Sister White is not the originator of these books [DA, GC, PP, COL]. They contain the instruction that during her lifework God has been giving her."--CM 125.

(h) "God gave me the light contained in The Great Controversy and Patriarchs and Prophets. . . . These works were not the product of any human mind; they are the voice of God speaking to His people."--CM 129.

(i) "I take no credit of ability in myself to write the articles in the paper or to write the books which I publish. Certainly I could not originate them. I have been receiving light for the last 45 years and I have been communicating the light given me of heaven to our people."--Letter 60, 1890.

(j) "I have written many books, and they have been given a wide circulation. Of myself I could not have brought out the truth in these books, but the Lord has given me the help of His Holy Spirit. These books, giving the instruction that the Lord has given me during the past 60 years, contain light from heaven, and will bear the test of investigation."--1SM 35.

(k) "I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision, the precious rays of light shining from the throne."--1SM 29.

(l) "You may say that this communication was only a letter. Yes, it was a letter, but prompted by the Spirit of God, to bring before your mind things that had been shown me. In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me."--5T 67; 1SM 27.

6. Question: "Are her interpretations of Bible prophecy regarded as final authority?" (Walter Martin, QOD 89.)

Answer: No. The final authority is the Scripture itself.

7. Question: Is belief in these writings made a test of fellowship in the Seventh-day Adventist church?

(a) Ellen G. White (Concerning some who did not understand the nature of her visions):

"Such should not be deprived of the benefits and privileges of the church, if their Christian course is otherwise correct, and they have formed a good Christian character.

"Some, I was shown, could receive the published visions, judging of the tree by its fruits. Others are like doubting Thomas; they cannot believe the published Testimonies, nor receive evidence through the testimony of others; but must see and have the evidence for themselves. Such must not be set aside, but long patience and brotherly love should be exercised toward them until they find their position and become established for or against."--Testimonies, vol. 1, p. 328.

(b) J. N. Andrews: "In the reception of members into our churches, we desire on this subject to know two things: (1) That they believe the Bible doctrine of spiritual gifts; (2) That they will candidly acquaint themselves with the visions of Sister White, which have ever held so prominent place in this work. We believe that every person standing thus and carrying out this purpose will be guided in the way of truth and righteousness. And those who occupy this ground are never denied all the time they desire to decide in this matter.--RH, Feb. 15, 1870.

(c) James White: It is not Seventh-day Adventists that are pressing the people upon this subject. They believe in the perpetuity of spiritual gifts. They believe that the spirit of prophecy has rested upon Mrs. White, and that she is called to do a special work at this time, among this people. They do not, however, make a belief in this work a test of Christian fellowship."--RH, June 13, 1871, p. 205.

(d) Uriah Smith: "I have always maintained the doctrine of the perpetuity of spiritual gifts, theoretically. I have believed, and do still believe, that the visions of Sister White are a practical illustration of that doctrine. But I have not believed, as past volumes of the Review will testify, that these, or any other manifestation of spiritual gifts, stood on a level with the Scriptures, or that they should be made a test of fellowship. I see as yet no occasion to change my views in any of these respects."--RH Supplement, Aug. 14, 1883, p. 10.

(e) George I. Butler: "Our enemies try very hard to make it appear that we make the visions a test of fellowship. They must know themselves that this charge is false. Our leading men have never done this, and the visions themselves teach that it should not be done."--RH Supplement, Aug. 14, 1883, p. 12.

(f) F. M. Wilcox: "In the practice of the church it has not been customary to disfellowship one because he did not recognize the doctrine of spiritual gifts. . . . A member of the church should not be excluded from membership because of his inability to recognize clearly the doctrine of spiritual gifts and its application to the second advent movement."--The Testimony of Jesus, pp. 141-143.

But we will disfellowship a member who openly fights against the gift.

(g) James White: "After men and women have had evidence that the work is of God, and then join hands with those who fight against it, our people claim the right to separate from such, that they may enjoy their sentiments in peace and quiet."--RH, June 13, 1871, p. 205.

(h) L. E. Froom, W. E. Read, R. A. Anderson: "If one who holds membership in our church loses confidence in these counsels and later stirs up enmity among the believers, we reserve the right to disfellowship such from the body. But such action will not be taken because of one's lack of confidence in these writings, but rather because the one disaffected is stirring up strife among the believers."--Questions on Doctrine, p. 97.

8. -- Conclusion:

To believe in the Bible and the Bible alone does not shut out the gifts mentioned in the Bible.

(a) J. N. Andrews: "Those who reject the work of the Spirit of God under the plea that the Scriptures are sufficient, do deny and reject all that part of the Bible which reveals the office and work of the Holy Spirit.

"Thus 1 Cor. 12, and Eph. 4, which define the gifts of the Spirit of God, cannot really form a part of the rule of life of those who affirm that the Scriptures are so sufficient in themselves that the gifts of the Spirit are unnecessary."--RH, Feb. 15, 1870.

(b) There is a very close affinity between Spirit of Prophecy and Bible. The Holy Spirit is the author of both. If we lose faith in the one we will eventually reject the other. Ellen White says, "If you lose confidence in the Testimonies, you will drift away from Bible truth" (5T 674).

9. General Conference Committee Action:

Affirmations

1. We believe that Scripture is the divinely revealed Word of God and is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

2. We believe that the canon of Scripture is composed only of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments.

3. We believe that Scripture is the foundation of faith and the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice.

4. We believe that Scripture is the Word of God in human language.

5. We believe that Scripture teaches that the gift of prophecy will be manifest in the Christian church after New Testament times.

6. We believe that the ministry and writings of Ellen White were a manifestation of the gift of prophecy.

7. We believe that Ellen White was inspired by the Holy Spirit and that her writings, the product of that inspiration, are applicable and authoritative, especially to Seventh-day Adventists.

8. We believe that the purposes of the Ellen White writings include guidance in understanding the teaching of Scripture and application of these teachings, with prophetic urgency, to the spiritual and moral life.

9. We believe that the acceptance of the prophetic gift of Ellen White is important to the nurture and unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

10. We believe that Ellen White's use of literary sources and assistants finds parallels in some of the writings of the Bible.

Denials

1. We do not believe that the quality or degree of inspiration in the writings of Ellen White is different from that of Scripture.

2. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are an addition to the canon of Sacred Scripture.

3. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White function as the foundation and final authority of Christian faith as does Scripture.

4. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White may be used as the basis of doctrine.

5. We do not believe that the study of the writings of Ellen White may be used to replace the study of Scripture.

6. We do not believe that Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White.

7. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture.

8. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are essential for the proclamation of the truths of Scripture to society at large.

9. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are the product of mere Christian piety.

10. We do not believe that Ellen White's use of literary sources and assistants negates the inspiration of her writings.

We conclude, therefore, that a correct understanding of the inspiration and authority of the writings of Ellen White will avoid two extremes: (1) regarding these writings as functioning on a canonical level identical with Scripture, or (2) considering them as ordinary Christian literature.

--Ministry, February, 1983.

Ellen G. White Estate
Washington, D. C.
July 7, 1986