

AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

A YOUNG ADULT'S ENCOUNTER WITH ELLEN WHITE *. . . ON THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE*

To put it simply, one of the main reasons I believe in Ellen White is that she never puts her writings above the Bible. Think about it: There are churches and denominations today whose teachings and beliefs depend on their founder or prophet, not on the Bible. That's not the way it is in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Ellen White always made it clear that she was the lesser light leading to the greater light of God's Word. I can see in her writings that she was only seeking to bring people to God and did not want to lift herself up above the Bible or call attention to herself.

Jesus says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32, KJV). This is what I see Ellen White doing. She lifts up Jesus and His Word. I believe God sent Ellen White as a prophet to our church. Right now, as you well know, not everyone my age believes in the message of Ellen White to modern-day Christians. I would even venture to guess that the majority of young adults don't read or believe.

I've been there. I questioned why the writings of this woman from 100 years ago even fit into our lives today. The reason I can say so definitely that Ellen White has value as a modern-day prophet is that I see her (1) lifting up Jesus, and (2) upholding the Bible as the Word of God and the final authority for Christians. The true testimony is that by reading her books people fall in love with Jesus,

and that leads them to reading more in the Word of God.

I know that is true, because it happened to me.

—Jo, age 21

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The quality of Ellen White that draws me to her most is her love of Jesus and her insistence on the authority of Scripture. Many times she has expressed in her writings that Scripture alone is the basis for the truth. She considered herself a “lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light [the Bible].”¹¹²

These statements give me confidence that I can trust her writings in my daily walk with God. I thank the Lord for the fabulous asset of Mrs. White's writings that have been given to help us better understand biblical truths. She was a messenger for the Lord, and she understood that role and abided by it with utmost faithfulness and responsibility. I respect her for that and use her writings as another tool in my study of Scripture. Nothing can replace the Bible, and I am very sensitive to the thought of someone criticizing or trying to change the Bible. I take assurance in knowing that Mrs. White felt that same way. When I read Patriarchs and Prophets or The Great Controversy, the Bible comes alive for me!

As far as I'm concerned, the Bible is my guidebook on the journey of my life, and Mrs. White's writings are somewhat like the Cliff Notes.

—Michael, age 26

SCRIPTURE

From childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who

belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf (John 5:39).

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book (Revelation 22:18, 19).

Now if people say to you, "Consult the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and mutter; should not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living, for teaching and for instruction?" (Isaiah 8:19, 20).

These Jews were more receptive than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11).

The Bible is more valuable as an educating power than the writings of all the philosophers of all ages. With a wide range of style and subjects, the Bible has something interesting and morally instructive for everyone. The light of revelation shines brightly into the distant past, where chronicles of history fail to illuminate. Biblical poetry evokes the wonder and admiration of the world. In glowing beauty, in sublime and solemn majesty, in touching pathos, it is unequalled by the most brilliant productions of human genius. The Bible contains sound logic and impassioned eloquence. It portrays courageous acts of integrity, examples of private goodness and public honor, lessons of holiness and purity.¹¹³

Nothing will energize the mind and strengthen the intellect more than the study of the Word of God. No other book has the power to uplift thoughts and invigorate abilities as the Bible. If God's Word were studied as it should be,

men and women would have the open mind, excellent character, and firm purpose that are rarely seen in these times. The search for truth will reward the seeker, and each discovery will open up more valuable fields for investigation.¹¹⁴

We should prize the Bible because it reveals the will of God. Here we learn the object for our creation and how to attain that objective. We learn how to make wise use of the present life and how to obtain the future life. No other book can satisfy the questionings of the mind or the cravings of the heart. As we acquire a knowledge of God's Word and practice it in our lives, we may rise from the lowest depths of degradation to become children of God, the companions of sinless angels.¹¹⁵

In searching the Scriptures, in reflecting on the words of life, consider it as the voice of God to the soul. We may be confused sometimes over the voice of our friends; but in the Bible we have the counsel of God upon all important subjects which concern our eternal interests. Even in our secular affairs we may learn a great deal from the Bible. Its teaching will be always suited to our individual circumstances, preparing us to endure trial and making us ready for our God-given work.

The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, we would open God's Word with awe and seriously search its laws. Reading and contemplating the Scriptures would be considered as an audience with the Eternal God.¹¹⁶

What book can compare with the Bible? An understanding of its teachings is essential for every child and youth, as well as older persons, for it is the word of God, given to guide the human family to heaven. In the world today many things are idolized, and there are many philosophies and ideologies. Without an understanding of the Scriptures it is impossible for the youth to understand what is truth, or to tell

the difference between the sacred and the ordinary.¹¹⁷

The people of God must look to the Scriptures as their safety against the influence of false teachers and the deceiving power of the spirits of darkness. Satan tries everything possible to prevent everyone from knowing the Bible, because its plain teachings reveal his deceptions. Whenever God's work revives, the prince of evil rises to more intense activity. Right now Satan is exerting his strongest efforts for a final struggle against Jesus and His followers. The last great deception is just ready to open to our view. The antichrist will perform miracles that we will actually see. The counterfeit will be so similar to the true that the only way to know the difference will be by the Bible. By the principles of Scripture every statement and miracle must be tested.

Those who are trying to obey all the commandments of God will be opposed and mocked. We can stand only in God. In order to stand up to the trial ahead of us, we must understand God's will as revealed in His Word. We can honor God only as we understand his character, government, and purposes. Only those who have strengthened their minds with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict. To each of us will come the searching test: Will I obey God rather than human beings? That decisive hour is right upon us. Are our feet planted on the rock of God's unchanging word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?

When God sends warnings so important that they are symbolized by holy angels flying through the heavens, He requires each of us to pay attention. The awful judgments against the worship of the beast and his image (Revelation 14:9-11) should lead all of us to a diligent study of the prophecies to find out what the mark of the beast is and how we can avoid receiving it. But the masses of the people turn away from hearing the truth and turn toward fables and mys-

ticism. The apostle Paul declared, looking down to the last days, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:3, KJV). That time is here. Most people do not want Bible truth because it interferes with the desires of their sinful, world-loving hearts. Satan then supplies the deceptions that they love.

But God will have a group of people on the earth who maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard for all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of educated men and women, the deductions of science, the many conflicting creeds or decisions of religious organizations, the voice of the majority—none of these things should be the basis for or against any point of religious faith. Instead, before accepting any teaching or doctrine, we should demand a plain “This is what God says” in its support.

Satan is constantly trying to attract attention to humans in the place of God. He leads people to look to bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides instead of searching the Scriptures to find for themselves how to live and believe.

The influence of the leading religious leaders led the Jewish nation to reject their Redeemer. The spirit that controlled those priests and rulers is still shown by many who act as if they are extremely religious. But they refuse to examine the Scriptures concerning the special truths for this time of earth’s history. Instead, they point out how many they are, how wealthy, how popular—and scoff at those who maintain truth because they are few in number, poor, and unpopular, having a faith that separates them from the world.

Even though the Bible is full of warnings against false teachers, many people today depend on the clergy to define their spirituality. Thousands of church members can give no other reason for their beliefs than that is what they were taught by their religious leaders. They almost ignore Jesus’

teachings and place total confidence in the words of the ministers. But are ministers perfect in their knowledge? How can we trust our spirituality to their guidance unless we know from God's Word that they are right? A lack of courage to stand alone leads many to follow highly educated professionals—by their reluctance to investigate for themselves, they are becoming hopelessly fastened in the chains of error.

Satan uses many influences to capture his victims. Many partner with Satan through their romantic attachments to those who are enemies of the cross of Christ. Parents, family, spouses, or friends who oppose Bible truth exert their power to control your conscience. Have courage to obey your own convictions!

It is impossible for us, with the Bible within our reach, to honor God by false opinions. You've probably heard that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as your life is right. But your life is shaped by your faith. If truth is available to us and we choose to ignore it, we are choosing darkness.

"Sometimes there is a way that seems to be right, but in the end it is the way to death" (Proverbs 16:25). Ignorance is no excuse for sin when there is every opportunity to know the will of God. A young person on a road trip comes to an intersection with highway signs indicating where each freeway leads. If he ignores the signs and takes whichever road seems right to him, he may be completely sincere, but will likely find himself on the wrong road.

God has given us His Word so that we can become familiar with its teachings and know for ourselves what He requires of us. When the lawyer came to Jesus with the question "How am I saved?" Jesus referred him to the Scriptures, saying, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" (Luke 10:26). Ignorance will not excuse young or old or release them from the punishment for breaking God's law when they could have understood its claims. It is

not enough to have good intentions; it is not enough to do what you think is right or what the minister tells you is right. Your salvation is at stake, and you must search the Scriptures for yourself. However strong your convictions, however confident you may be that the minister knows what is truth, this is not your foundation. You have a chart pointing out every landmark on the trip to heaven, and you should not guess at anything.

Our first and highest duty is to learn from the Scriptures what is truth and then to obey what you learn and encourage others to do the same. We should study the Bible diligently every day, analyzing every thought, and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves, just as we are to answer for ourselves before God.

The truths that are most plainly revealed in the Bible have been covered in doubt and darkness by some theologians, who, pretending to be critical thinkers, teach that the Scriptures have a mystical, secret, spiritual meaning beyond the mere words. These people are false teachers. To this type of person Jesus declared, "You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God" (Mark 12:24). The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or metaphor is used. Jesus has given the promise, "Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God" (John 7:17). If young people would take the Bible as it reads, if there were no false teachers to mislead and confuse their minds, a work would be accomplished that would make angels glad and that would bring thousands and thousands to Jesus who are now wandering in error.

We should discipline our minds to concentrate when we study the Scriptures. Even though we focus intently on understanding (within our human limitations) the deep things of

God, yet we must remember that the teachableness and submission of a child is the true spirit of the learner. Scriptural difficulties can never be mastered by the same methods used in grappling with philosophical problems. We should not come to the study of the Bible with that self-reliance with which many enter the domains of science, but with a prayerful dependence upon God and a sincere desire to learn His will. We must come with a humble and teachable spirit to receive knowledge from the God of the universe. Otherwise, evil angels will blind our minds and harden our hearts so that we will not be impressed with the truth.

An understanding of Bible truth doesn't depend as much on intellectual ability as on the intent, the earnest longing to do right.

The Bible should never be studied without prayer. Only the Holy Spirit can help us understand how important even the simple things are or prevent us from misinterpreting the difficult passages. The work of the heavenly angels is to prepare our hearts so to understand God's Word that we will be captivated by its beauty, cautioned by its warnings, and energized and strengthened by its promises. We should make the psalmist's prayer our own: "Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (Psalm 119:18). Temptations often appear irresistible because, by neglecting prayer and the study of the Bible, we cannot quickly remember God's promises and meet Satan with the Scripture weapons. But angels surround those who are willing to be taught heaven's secrets, and in a crisis they will bring back to our minds the very truths that we need.

Jesus promised His disciples, "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). But the teachings of Jesus must previously have been stored in our minds in order for the Spirit

of God to bring them to our memory in the time of danger. "I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11).

If you value your eternal interests, be on guard against the inroads of skepticism. The truth will be attacked. It is impossible to keep beyond the reach of sarcasm, fallacies, and subtle, destructive attitudes. Satan customizes his temptations to harass everyone. He attacks the illiterate with jokes or putdowns, while he meets the educated with scientific objections and philosophical reasoning. Both are premeditated to provoke distrust or contempt of the Scriptures. Even young people, with little of life's experience, sometimes presume to insinuate doubts concerning the basic principles of Christianity. Their skepticism, shallow as it is, influences others. Many are led to joke about the faith of their ancestors and cause pain to the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:29). Many lives that could have been an honor to God and a positive impact on the world have been spoiled by the foul breath of infidelity. All who trust to the bragging decisions of human reason and imagine that they can explain divine mysteries and arrive at truth unaided by the wisdom of God are entangled in the snare of Satan.

We are living in the most critical period of this world's history. The destiny of every person on Planet Earth is about to be decided. Our own future well-being, as well as the salvation of others, depends upon the course we now choose. We need to be guided by the Spirit of truth. Every follower of Christ should seriously ask, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6, NKJV). We should humble ourselves before the Lord with fasting and prayer and meditate much on His Word, especially on the scenes of the judgment. We should search for a living experience in the things of God. We don't have a moment to lose. Important, significant events are taking place around us; we are on Satan's en-

chanted ground. Don't sleep, sentries of God! The enemy is lurking near, waiting for you to become lazy and drowsy so he can spring upon you and make you his prey.

Are you deceived about your true condition before God? Do you congratulate yourself about the wrong acts you do not commit, and forget about the kind, compassionate deeds God requires and you have neglected to do? It is not enough to be trees in the garden of God. We are to meet God's expectations by bearing fruit. He holds us accountable for our failure to accomplish all the good that we could have done through His grace strengthening us. God doesn't want us to clutter up the garden. Yet even the case of the "clutterers" is not entirely hopeless. God's heart of patient love still pleads with those who have ignored God's mercy and abused His grace. "'Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.' Be careful then how you live . . . making the most of the time" (Ephesians 5:14, 15).¹¹⁸

When the big test comes, those who have made God's Word their rule of life will be unveiled. In summer there is no noticeable difference between evergreens and other trees, but when the blasts of winter come, the evergreens remain unchanged while the other trees are stripped of their leaves. The superficial "Christian" may not now be easily distinguished from the real Christian, but the time is just upon us when the difference will be obvious. If opposition rises, if prejudice and intolerance occur, if persecution is kindled, the halfhearted and hypocritical will waver and yield the faith. But true Christians will stand firm as a rock, their faith stronger, their hope brighter than ever before!¹¹⁹

Dear youth, pray as you never before prayed for beams from the Sun of Righteousness to shine upon the Word so that you may be able to understand its true meaning. Jesus pleaded that His disciples might live out their holy calling through the Word of God. You, then, should also intently

pray that the Holy Spirit, our Guide to all truth, may be with you in your study of God's Holy Word.¹²⁰

(For additional reading on this subject we recommend *The Great Controversy*, *Life Sketches*, *Experience and Teachings of Ellen G White*, and *Education*.)

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Briefly review the function of scripture as outlined in 2 Timothy 3:15-17. Which is easier and which is harder for you to include in your concept of inspiration?
2. If you were to discover an apparent discrepancy (difference) between the Bible and the writings of Ellen White, how would you go about resolving the issue?
3. What are several steps for preparing to study the Bible?
4. How does careful study of God's Word affect what we do in life?