

# "THE LIGHT STILL SHINES"

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## A Devotional talk given during the Annual Spring Meeting Of the General Conference Committee

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### Introduction:

Light—how important it is for us! In the beginning God said, “Let there be light.”<sup>i</sup> A few days later He created Adam and Eve, “cloth[ing] them with a covering of light and glory.”<sup>ii</sup> Many years later in the wilderness He led Israel by the pillar of cloud by day and light by night.<sup>iii</sup> God has employed light in its many forms—real and symbolic—for the benefit of His people.

Ellen White unhesitatingly declared that “Christ loves His church.” (SD 13)<sup>iv</sup> Is it any wonder then that exactly as foretold—at the same time as God called our church into existence—in His love and wisdom He gave us another special gift of light by renewing the gift of prophecy in our midst? As Revelation 19:10 so beautifully describes it,

“The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Speaking about that unfathomable love that Jesus has for His church, Ellen White wrote,

“The church, enfeebled and defective though it be, is the only object on earth on which Christ bestows His supreme regard. He is constantly watching it with solicitude, and is strengthening it by his Holy Spirit. Will we, as members of His church, allow Him to impress our minds and to work through us to His glory?”—SD 13.<sup>v</sup>

Little wonder then that in His love and concern for us, Jesus would choose to bring light directly to His end time people. Consequently, since our earliest days, Seventh-day Adventists have believed that Ellen White was the recipient of the gift of prophecy. Our pioneers witnessed for themselves God’s leading in the founding of our movement, experiencing first hand His blessing through the messages He gave Ellen White. They soon learned that when they followed the Spirit of prophecy counsels, they prospered and were blessed; but when they did not, they faltered and stumbled.

Today, various voices both within and without Adventism are urging that we take another look at Ellen White. Some are now saying that, like eccentric old Uncle Homer and Aunt Hortense who everyone in the family know

but all hope will not show up at the next family reunion, it is time for the church to consign Ellen White to the denomination's attic. She was O. K. in her time, but, they claim, that time has now long passed.

However, Solomon insightfully stated in Proverbs 29:18,

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

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## **Ten Contributions from Ellen G. White to the Seventh-day Adventist Church:**

As I have listened to the crescendo of calls for us to abandon Ellen White, I have sometimes wondered what Adventism might be like today were it not for God's guidance and counsels through her. Although not exhaustive, let me mention several things she contributed, none of which, I assume, any of us would want now to give up:

- The Great Controversy Theme. Her insights not only help define for us the essence of Adventism, including our emphasis on the Three Angels' Messages, but that theme also impacts almost everything else that we teach and do.
- Her strong emphasis on the centrality of the Bible in the life and witness of our church, as well as her insights regarding inspiration that spare us the challenges faced by those who believe in the inerrancy of prophetic writings.
- Her emphasis on righteousness by faith—without her influence it is doubtful that Elders A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner's views would have gone anywhere.
- Her emphasis on Christ and His eternal pre-existence, as well as her teaching of the full personhood of the Holy Spirit.
- Her emphasis on health, and healthful living, including the establishment of our worldwide health work.
- Her emphasis on education, resulting in the establishment of church schools, academies, and colleges around the world—and now full universities; not to mention her deep interest in young people.
- Her call for publications, resulting in our worldwide publishing ministry. Couple with that the impact of her own classics, including *Steps to Christ*, *Christ's Object Lessons*, the *Conflict of the Ages* series, plus many others.
- Her impact on our church's organization, as well as the unifying effect that her writings have had on Adventism, both theologically and organizationally.
- Her emphasis on religious liberty and human rights, including her strong support for the Black work here in America. Included also were her calls to help the poor, resulting in the worldwide work of ADRA and our Community Services workers.
- Also her call for worldwide evangelism, coupled with her call to witness to our own neighbors who live nearby. Included also is her reminder that God has many outside our church, plus her

appeals for interaction with pastors of other faiths.

At the beginning of my list, I mused regarding how Adventism might look today were it not for Ellen White. Besides all these theological and organizational contributions, one doesn't have to look far to find another difference. The Advent Christian Church—Sundaykeeping adventists who trace their origins back to the Millerite movement—shortly after the Great Disappointment in 1844 had an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 followers. Today, they have about 75,000 members in 19 countries! Back then, Sabbathkeeping adventists totaled somewhere between 50 and 150.

In 1907 Ellen White wrote,

“Abundant light has been given to our people in these last days. Whether or not my life is spared, my writings will constantly speak, and their work will go forward as long as time shall last.”—1 *SM* 55.<sup>vi</sup>

For most Seventh-day Adventists, that prediction has proved true. However, tragically, especially in recent years, an increasing number have been turning from the special messages God has given us. Some are outright rejecting everything bearing the name “Ellen G. White.” Predicting this, Ellen White warned:

“There will be a hatred kindled against the testimonies which is satanic. The workings of Satan will be to unsettle the faith of the churches in them, for this reason: Satan cannot have so clear a track to bring in his deceptions and bind up souls in his delusions if the warnings and reproofs and counsels of the Spirit of God are heeded.”—1 *SM* 48.<sup>vii</sup>

A second group views Ellen White as a devotional writer, but they are unwilling to give her any real authority. These people also miss the blessing God intended for us. Though they claim to retain her writings devotionally, they disregard the counsels God has given through her.

And there's a third group who also puzzle and trouble me. These individuals thrive on misinterpreting God's messages found in Ellen White's writings. They find a quote or two and turn these into their entire religion. In their missionary zeal, they try to force their narrow views upon everyone else. For whatever reason, they have overlooked the fact that God's plan for His church, as found in Ellen White's writings, is balanced; it is not one-sided.

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## **Ten Reasons Why Ellen G. White is Still Relevant to the Adventist Church Today:**

During the next few minutes I want briefly to share with you ten reasons why the writings of Ellen White are still relevant—and hold authority—for me. These are not deep theological reasons, but rather simple, practical things that speak to my heart. Hopefully some of these reasons will also resonate with you.

### **1. Uplifted Christ**

Ellen White constantly uplifted Christ, and pointed people to Him. One cannot read far in her writings without coming across references to Jesus and comments that reveal her deep love for Him, and her strong desire for others to come to love Him also. Several of her most beloved books deal directly with Christ: *Steps to Christ*, *The Desire of Ages*, *Christ's Object Lessons*, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, and *The Great Controversy Between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels*.

To me, Ellen White's constant uplifting of Christ, and pointing people to Him, are very persuasive evidences in favor of her claim. Would Satan continually urge people to go to Christ? The very thought is ludicrous. So, as a sinner, realizing my own deep need of Christ, going to a time-proven source of

help in this area is one reason I find Ellen White's writings so valuable in my own life.

## 2. Great Controversy Theme

Ellen White's teaching of the Great Controversy Theme makes sense out of our troubled world. Rather than the view of many people that God is angry with us, Ellen White's understanding was that the real struggle is between Christ and Satan, not between Christ and me. That insight permeates all her writings.

When bad things happen to God's people, thanks to our understanding of the Great Controversy that is going on between Christ and Satan, we can keep our perspective. Although not able to explain the whys and wherefores of every specific thing that happens, we realize that there is a larger battle raging.

This to me is another positive reason for accepting Ellen White's writings. Her understanding of God, His controversy with Satan—including both the origin and the ending of the sin problem—are so persuasive, why would I want to adopt something else, especially since her entire understanding is based upon Scripture?

## 3. Spiritual/Devotional Blessings

Following the counsels God has given us through Ellen White results in positive lifestyle blessings. Let me start with some spiritual/devotional examples.

Some years ago the North American Division conducted a church growth survey. One of the survey questions asked about the extent of one's regular study of Ellen White's books. From their answers, 2,848 were classed as "readers," and 5,375 as "non-readers." Later the data was re-analyzed to see what impact regular reading of Ellen White exhibited in the lives of members.<sup>viii</sup>

Let me share some of the findings with you.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Readers</b>	<b>Nonreaders</b>
☞ Strong relationship with Jesus Christ	85%	59%
☞ Assurance of being right with God	82%	59%
☞ Daily personal Bible study	82%	47%
☞ Give regular financial support to local soul winning	76%	46%
☞ Engaged in witnessing during past year	73%	49%
☞ Have daily family worship	70%	42%
☞ Held Bible studies with non-Adventist during past year	45%	26%
☞ Meet regularly with small study fellowship group	40%	20%

There were eleven other categories. In every single one, those who read Ellen White regularly ranked considerably higher than did the non-readers. So another reason why I find Ellen White's writings valuable in my own life—as was borne out by the survey results—is that my walk with the Lord and my experience as one of His followers will be the richer for having spent time with God's counsels as given through Ellen White. I can't speak for anyone else, but I need that!

## 4. Health Advantages

Besides the spiritual benefits that come from reading and adhering to the counsels found in Ellen White's writings, there also are health advantages. During recent years there has been considerable discussion regarding what Mrs. White said about health. Some critics have claimed she obtained her teachings from other nineteenth century health reformers. She said her health principles came from God.

In the late 1860s and early 1870s, a number of health reformers in America were advocating that no salt at all should be used. Ellen White saw things differently. But it is her reason for doing so that is of special interest to me.

"I use some salt, and always have, because from the light given me by God, this article, in place of being deleterious, is actually essential for the blood. The whys and wherefores of this I know not, but I give you the instruction as it is given me."—*CD 344*.<sup>ix</sup>

I'm not here today to re-discuss from where she acquired her health message. Rather, I am sharing with you why I find her counsels still relevant. However, I must say that I do find it very odd that now, when in so many areas of health the world is mirroring what God showed Ellen White 140 years ago, some Adventists are abandoning her counsel.

Why do I say this? Well, *Time* magazine phrased it better than I ever could. In their October 28, 1966, issue, reporting on the initial results of the first Adventist Health Study done in California, the findings were so phenomenal that *Time* described them as "The Adventist Advantage." Obviously we do not have time to cite that study in great detail, but even a few facts from it, and subsequent health studies, are worth noting.

The first Adventist Health Study was conducted between 1958 and 1965, on Californian Adventists. The researchers did not differentiate between Adventists who ate meat daily, weekly, monthly, or not at all. Nor did they distinguish between lacto-ovo-vegetarians and total vegans. Even so, Seventh-day Adventists (including the non-vegetarians) had significantly fewer deaths from a number of common killers as compared to the general California population. It was found that Adventists had only

- 20 percent, lung cancer
- 5 percent, mouth, throat, and larynx cancer
- 32 percent, bronchitis and emphysema
- 28 percent, bladder cancer
- 34 percent, esophageal cancer
- 13 percent, cirrhosis of the liver<sup>x</sup>

According to a subsequent study started in 1974, Adventist men live on the average 8.9 years longer than the general California population; Adventist women, 7.5 years longer. Vegetarian Adventist men live 3.7 years longer than their non-vegetarian "brothers."<sup>xi</sup>

Similar studies in other countries yielded comparable results:

In 1982 Denmark's Cancer Registration Office in Copenhagen reported, after a thirty-five year study, that only one in ten Adventists developed cancer, whereas the rate for the Danish population was one in four.

In 1983 a Dutch study reported an 8.9-year life expectancy advantage for Adventist men, and a 3.7-year advantage for Adventist women compared to their general population.

A Polish study reported in 1985 that Adventist men had an advantage of 9.5 years, and Adventist women a difference of 4.5 years.

And the statistics just go on and on. I don't know about you, but for me, such facts make me sit up and take notice regarding what Ellen White says God told her about health issues. Is she still relevant to me? I should say so! In a world gone crazy over new health diets, programs, and fads, the messages God gave our church through Ellen White are right on target—they have borne the test of time.

## 5. Uplifted the Bible

Another compelling reason why I personally find Ellen White's messages authoritative is that she gave us no new Bible. Throughout her long life Mrs. White continually pointed people to the Scriptures. In her first 64-page book originally published in 1851, now reprinted in *Early Writings*, the 23-year old author closed by saying,

“I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice.”—*EW* 78.<sup>xii</sup>

Toward the close of her long life, the nearly 82-year-old servant of the Lord attended the 1909 General Conference session held in Washington, D.C. As it turned out, it was the last session she ever attended. Elder W. A. Spicer, secretary of the General Conference, recalled Mrs. White's last talk to the delegates.

“She came to the platform, on the last day of the session, to speak a . . . few words of good cheer and farewell, and then turned to the pulpit, where lay a Bible. She opened the book, and held it out, with hands that trembled with age. And she said:

“Brethren and sisters, I commend unto you this Book.’

“Without another word, she closed the book, and walked from the platform. It was her last spoken word in the world assembly of the remnant church.”<sup>xiii</sup>

Throughout her long life, Ellen White constantly uplifted the Bible. Nowhere can one find her claiming that her writings supersede the Bible. On the contrary, she always said that her writings are to be tested by the Scriptures. Not once does she say that the Bible is to be tested by her writings. This makes her unique among those who claim to have been given new light.

Ellen White wrote:

“Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.”—*CM* 125.<sup>xiv</sup>

Thankfully our doctrines are not based on Ellen White's visions, but rather upon deep study of the Word of God. Still, history records that during the Sabbath and Sanctuary Conferences of the late 1840s, as well as several other times, God chose to confirm and help our pioneers settle into Bible truth through the visions. Knowing this to be true, I find Ellen White's doctrinal insights to be more than just devotional; for me they hold authority. I did not say, as some of our critics charge, that she is an infallible commentator. But for me, I invest her doctrinal statements with more authority than those of

other writers because of the Source (capital “S”) of her insights.

## 6. Impact on Church Institutions

Another reason I find Ellen White’s counsels still relevant has to do with her impact on the church’s institutions, both in establishing them and in administering them.

We’re not just a preaching ministry; Adventists sponsor both a world-wide education system, and a world-wide publishing work. In addition, our medical program is internationally known, all largely the product of Ellen White’s nurturing.

The fact is that these worldwide programs would never have reached their present achievements without the foresight and principles set forth by Ellen White. But it’s not their worldwide scope that makes them special, but rather it is their unique objectives. Adventist schools, publishing houses, and medical facilities are *not* distinctive merely because they are run by religious people, but because of carefully guided principles outlined by God through Ellen White.

Some non-Adventists have conjectured that without Ellen White, Adventists would not have survived as we are known today. Kenneth L. Woodward, *Newsweek* magazine’s religion editor, observed: “If it [the Seventh-day Adventist denomination] loses its founding mother, the church may find that it has also lost its distinctive visionary soul.”<sup>xv</sup>

Is she still relevant to me today? I should say so! If even non-Adventists recognize that Ellen White’s vision (could I say “visions?”) drive this church.

## 7. Predictions

I could also mention some of her incredible predictions. Admittedly, Ellen White is not primarily known for her predictions. Contrary to all modern “prophets” or psychics who every December give their “best ten predictions” for the coming year, or who state their predictions so vaguely that they can be reinterpreted and “made to fit” as time passes, Ellen White’s preview of closing events has never been contradicted by events. Today’s economic insecurity, political strife, social unrest, decline in moral values, New Age revival of spiritualism, and the worldwide interest in religious unity—all are an astonishing fulfillment of her predictions.

We are so familiar with some of her predictions that they hardly seem startling to us today. However, when set against the backdrop of her time, they are nothing short of incredible. For instance, her claim that wars would continue until Christ comes sounded very strange in a pre-World War I era where the belief was that everything was getting better and better. Even after the horrors of the First World War, Ellen White’s warnings about thousands of ships being hurled into the depths of the sea, and navies going down [1890],<sup>xvi</sup> and economic upheavals to come [1909],<sup>xvii</sup> must have sounded very strange. But now that the world has gone through the worldwide depression of the late 1920s and 1930s, not to mention World War II, plus all the wars in various places since then, what she predicted reads like the daily newspaper.

As terrible as things have become—increase of crime, pollution in the cities, the breakdown of society—knowing that God has warned us ahead of time about all this through Ellen White gives a relevance to other things she has written that might not otherwise be the case.

## 8. Impact of Her Life

Another thing about Ellen White that gives her authority and relevance for me is the fruit of her life.

During her lifetime she held no church offices. Surprising as it may be for students of nineteenth-century religious movements, Ellen White left no monuments to herself. Rather, her life was driven by a sense of destiny wrapped up in her call to be God's messenger. She focused on making God better understood as she relayed to others His messages to her.

A. G. Daniells, General Conference president from 1901-1922, and long-time fellow worker with Ellen White, wrote in 1935:

"I can say that it is my deep conviction that Mrs. White's life far transcends the life of anyone I have ever known or with whom I have been associated. . . . I never once heard her boast of the gracious gift God had bestowed upon her, or of the marvelous results of her endeavors. She did rejoice in the fruitage, but gave all the glory to Him who wrought through her."<sup>xviii</sup>

## 9. Physical Phenomena

One reason for giving authority to Ellen White's writings that some might have expected me to mention early on was the physical phenomena that accompanied her visions. That she did not breathe, her eyes remained open, and that she was totally unconscious of her surroundings while in vision are all in accordance with the physical phenomena experienced by Biblical prophets. The fact that this is so adds to the authority I give her writings, but I know that Satan can counterfeit physical phenomena. So for me, as with our pioneers, the physical phenomena surrounding Ellen White's experience lend support for believing in the divine origin of her visions, but are not of themselves coercive proof.

However, if God went to the supernatural lengths that He did to help me know He was speaking through Ellen White, then I better sit up and take notice. After all, in Bible times God considered rejection of His prophets as rejection of Himself.

## 10. Self Authenticating

Let me share one last reason why I find Ellen White's messages personally valuable. Admittedly, it is a very subjective reason, but that doesn't lessen its validity. When I read her writings, I hear the voice of God speaking to my soul—in other words, her writings are self-authenticating.

When I read *The Desire of Ages*, I do not just read about Jesus, I actually meet Him in the pages of that book. In her chapter "Gethsemane," or her description of Christ's trial and crucifixion, I don't find myself just being a bystander. On the contrary, I am drawn into the story. I am there with the sleeping disciples in the Garden. Christ is asking me to watch and wait with Him. It's not just Peter who is standing by the fire, I am there too. In the judgment hall, I mingle with the shouting mob. And on the terrible mount of crucifixion, I am pounding the nails into the innocent hands of Christ; I am there railing on Him as He hangs broken, bloodied, and bruised on the cross. But as I read, somehow the light dawns in my sin beclouded mind that it was for *me* that He died. And in my mind's ear I can hear Jesus praying, "Father, forgive Jim, for he doesn't have a clue what he is doing."

Likewise, in reading the *Testimonies*, I am driven to my knees, just as were the people to whom the messages were originally addressed one hundred or more years ago. Tragically some people get all hung up on what they view as the "don'ts" in Ellen White's writings. Those very same "don'ts" that some people see, Ellen White viewed as opportunities to draw even closer to God as in love we do those things that He as our creator knows will bring us the greatest amount of happiness.

## Conclusion:

This morning, do you want to be more like Jesus? Do you want a stronger Christian experience, a closer relationship with Christ, a longer, healthier life? If so, I recommend to you anew the special gift God has given our church through the writings of Ellen White. For me, they are as up-to-date as next week's newspaper, and even more relevant than the latest published self-help book.

That's why I've come to the place where I can readily acknowledge that the testimonies are *for me*. Not to use on someone else, but to help *me* in my daily Christian walk. The gift of the Spirit of prophecy was given *for me*. Not to use to judge or criticize you. But rather, God gave His church this precious gift to help draw *me* to Jesus. He gave it to draw *me* to a deeper study of the Bible. And most of all, He gave the gift to help prepare *me* to be ready for Christ's soon return.

My friend, if any here today are not utilizing this precious gift right now—the lesser light that leads us to the greater light<sup>xix</sup>—maybe you never have, or possibly you used to, but for some reason or other in recent years you have not, I want to invite you to do so once again. After all, King Jehoshaphat's admonition to ancient Israel, as found in 2 Chronicles 20:20, is as relevant today as when he first uttered it:

“Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.”

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- i. Genesis 1:3.
  - ii. *Patriarchs and Prophets*. p. 45.
  - iii. Exodus 14: 19, 20.
  - iv. *Sons and Daughters of God*, 13, *Manuscript 52*, 1901.
  - v. *Ibid.*, *Manuscript 155*, 1902.
  - vi. *Selected Messages*, bk 1, p. 55.
  - vii. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 48, *Letter 40*, 1890 [Originally written to Uriah Smith, Dec. 30, 1890.]
  - viii. Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings, Jr., “Who Reads Ellen White?” *Ministry*, October, 1982, p. 10.
  - ix. *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 344.
  - x. Statistics are from “Summary of results of Adventist Mortality Study—1958-1965,” unpublished report, Loma Linda University School of Health, undated, 2 pp.
  - xi. *Ministry*, Sept. 1989, pp. 24-27.
  - xii. *Early Writings*, p. 78.
  - xiii. *The Spirit of Prophecy in the Advent Movement*, p. 30.

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xiv. *Colporteur Ministry*, p. 125.

xv. *Newsweek*, Jan. 19, 1981.

xvi. *The Signs of the Times*, April 21, 1890.

xvii. *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 13.

xviii. *The Abiding Gift of Prophecy*, p. 368.

xix. *Colporteur Ministry*, p. 125.