

Francis McLellan Wilcox on the Relationship of Ellen White to the Bible: 1944

Church leader and author during the mid 1900s. All bold in the text is the editor's emphasis.

The Testimony of Jesus: A Review of the Work and Teachings of Mrs. Ellen Gould White (1944)

Chapter 10—Not an Addition to the Sacred Canon

Do the writings of Mrs. E. G. White constitute for the church of Christ a new Bible? We answer emphatically, No. Do they constitute an addition to the Sacred Canon? We answer again unqualifiedly, No, indeed. In what we term the Holy Bible there is comprehended an all-sufficient revelation, revealing man's origin, the entrance of sin, the provisions of divine grace for his redemption as represented in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the necessary steps to make the gospel effective in human experience through the work of repentance and the exercise of faith by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and the final awards of life and death to be meted out to those who accept of this free salvation or to those who reject the proffers of God's great mercy. God in His providence selected from the writings of the prophets of the past those portions which contain that expression of His divine will best suited to constitute a great spiritual guidebook for all nations, times, and conditions. It evidently was not the divine purpose that any instruction which His Spirit might impart to His church in the latter days should be regarded as an addition to the completed canon of Scripture.

Not only should Mrs. White's writings be regarded as making no addition to the Bible, but only as they stand the test of the Sacred Canon can their claims be accepted. Indeed, it is by the Bible that the writings of Mrs. E. G. White and of every other person claiming divine revelation, are to be judged. The Bible is the great gauge, or rule, by which all other writings are tested and proved. To the truthfulness of these statements the Lord's messenger bears decided testimony. We quote from one of her leading publications as follows:

"In His Word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. 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 experiences. 'Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.' 2 Tim. 3:16, 17, R. V.

"Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His Word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the Word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And 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 that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. Says the apostle John, 'Believe not every spirit, but try the

spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.' 1 John 4:1. And Isaiah declares, 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' Isa. 8:20."—*The Great Controversy*, Introduction, p. vii.

Presented "in a False Light"

Mrs. White declares not only that the Testimonies are not "an addition to the Word of God," but that those who teach them in this manner present them "in a false light." The main purpose of the Testimonies is to give a clearer understanding of the Scriptures. The Word of God deals with great general principles. Mrs. White in her writings has taken these great principles and drawn them out in detail. The great truths of the Bible are simplified. We quote again:

"Brother R 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 manner 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. But notwithstanding all this, some who profess to make the Word of God their study, are found living in direct opposition to its plainest teachings. Then, to leave men and women without excuse, God gives plain and pointed testimonies, bringing them back to the Word that they have neglected to follow.' 'The Word of God abounds in general principles for the formation of correct habits of living, and the Testimonies, general and personal, have been calculated to call their attention more especially to these principles.'"—*Testimonies*, Vol. V, pp. 663, 664.

"The written Testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed. Man's duty to God and to his fellow man has been distinctly specified in God's Word; yet but few of you are obedient to the light given. Additional truth is not brought out; but God has through the Testimonies simplified the great truths already given, and in His own chosen way brought them before the people, to awaken and impress the mind with them, that all may be left without excuse. . . . The Testimonies are not to belittle the Word of God, but to exalt it, and attract minds to it, that the beautiful simplicity of truth may impress all."—*Id.*, p. 665.

Mrs. White's Estimate of the Bible

Mrs. White's understanding of the relationship sustained between her writings and the Bible was again clearly set forth in these words:

"Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light."—*Colporteur Evangelist*, p. 37.

The esteem in which Mrs. White held the Word of God and the manner in which she commended its study to others, are well expressed in the following words:

"What book can compare with the Bible? An understanding of its teachings is essential for every child and youth, and for those of mature age; for it is the Word of God, given to guide the human family to heaven. In the world today there are gods many and doctrines many. Without an understanding of the Scriptures it is impossible for the youth to understand what is truth, or to discern between the sacred and the common.

"The Word of God should stand as the highest educating book in our world, and should be treated with reverential awe. It should be placed in the hands of the children and youth as the great lesson book, that they may know Him whom to know aright is life eternal. . . .

"What more important knowledge can be gained than that which outlines the fall of man, and the consequences of that sin which opened the floodgates of woe upon the world; which tells of Christ's first advent? The incarnation of Christ, His divinity, His atonement, His wonderful life in heaven as our advocate, the office of the Holy Spirit,—all these vital themes of Christianity are revealed from Genesis to Revelation. Each is a golden link in the perfect chain of truth. Why, then, should not the Scriptures be exalted in every school in our land?"— *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 427.

The Bible Alone Our Rule of Faith

Every doctrine is to be tested by the Sacred Word. If any belief does not stand this test, it is of darkness and not of light.

"However much one may advance in spiritual life, he will never come to a point where he will not need diligently to search the Scriptures; for therein are found the evidences of our faith. All points of doctrine, even though they have been accepted as truth, should be brought to the law and to the testimony; if they cannot stand this test, 'there is no light in them.'"—*Testimonies*, Vol. V, p. 575.

"Do not make the Sabbath school lessons dry and spiritless. Leave the impression upon the mind that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is our rule of faith, and that the sayings and doings of men are not to be a criterion for our doctrines or actions."—*Testimonies on Sabbath School Work*, p. 32.

"The Bible is our rule of faith and doctrine. There is nothing more calculated to energize the mind and strengthen the intellect than the study of the Word of God. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts or give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible. If God's Word were studied as it should be, men would have a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose that are rarely seen in these times."— *Gospel Workers*, p. 249.

The Foundations of Our Faith

The foundations of the faith held by Seventh-day Adventists rest on the Word of God. They were developed by the study of this Word. This is well stated by James White in the *Review*

and *Herald* of October 16, 1855:

"But what deserves especial attention here, is the unrighteous use some are making of the visions. They take advantage of the common prejudices against visions, misrepresent them, and those who are not ready to join them in anathematizing them as the work of Satan, then brand any view held by the body of Sabbathkeepers as the 'vision view,' and not the Bible view of the subject. In this way an unhallowed prejudice can be excited in the minds of some against any view, and even all the views held by that body of Christians called Advent Sabbathkeepers. This course has been and is being pursued on the subjects of the two-horned beast, sanctuary, time to commence the Sabbath, and period of the establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth. It should be here understood that all these views as held by the body of Sabbathkeepers, were brought out from the Scriptures before Mrs. White had any view in regard to them. These sentiments are founded upon the Scriptures as their only basis,"

As to the relation of the *Testimonies* to the Bible, Uriah Smith, in an editorial in the *Review and Herald* of October 18, 1887, made the following statement:

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' All gifts of the Spirit in the church, must be thus tested. Now it is evident that that which tests occupies a higher position than that which is tested by it. This, in one word, expresses our view of the relative position which the Bible and the visions sustain to each other. But when a manifestation accords with the Word, and gives every evidence that it is a genuine manifestation of the Spirit of God, we submit it to the objector himself to say how far we may regard it lightly or despise or transgress its teachings with impunity. For the past nineteen years this has stood as the exponent of the views of this people on this point."

In closing this phase of our discussion we quote an apt illustration employed by Elder Smith in a *Review and Herald* editorial entitled "Do We Discard the Bible by Endorsing the Visions?"

"Suppose we are about to start upon a voyage. The owner of the vessel gives us a book of directions, telling us that it contains instructions sufficient for our whole journey, and that if we will heed them, we shall reach in safety our port of destination. Setting sail we open our book to learn its contents. We find that its author lays down general principles to govern us in our voyage, and instructs us as far as practicable, touching the various contingencies that may arise, till the end; but he also tells us that the latter part of our journey will be especially perilous; that the features of the coast are ever changing by reason of quicksands and tempests; 'but for this part of the journey,' says he, 'I have provided you a pilot, who will meet you, and give you such directions as the surrounding circumstances and dangers may require; and to him you must give heed.'

"With these directions we reach the perilous time specified, and the pilot, according to promise, appears. But some of the crew, as he offers his services, rise up against him. 'We

have the original book of directions,' say they, 'and that is enough for us. We stand upon that, and that alone; we want nothing of you.' Who now heed that original book of directions? those who reject the pilot, or those who receive him, as that book instructs them? Judge ye.

"But some, through lack of perception, or lack of principle, or the ebullitions of an unconquerable prejudice, one, or all combined, may meet us at this point like this: 'Then you would have us take Sister White as our pilot, would you?' It is to forestall any efforts in this direction, that this sentence is penned. We say no such thing. What we do say is distinctly this: that the gifts of the Spirit are given for our pilot through these perilous times, and wherever and in whomsoever we find genuine manifestations of these, we are bound to respect them, nor can we do otherwise without in so far rejecting the Word of God, which directs us to receive them. Who now stand upon the Bible, and the Bible alone?

"Let no one then be frightened at this false alarm. A moment's consideration will show who receive the Bible, and who do not. Whoever receives it fully, will receive the pilot according to its directions. We do not, then, discard, but obey, the Bible by endorsing the visions; while we should just so far reject and disobey it, as we should refuse to receive the provisions it has made for our comfort, edification, and perfection."—*Review and Herald*, Jan. 13, 1863.