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Moon, Jerry, "1862 Letter To Susan Russel On Assurance" (2010). *Memory, Meaning & Life*. 42.
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July 14, 2010

1862 Letter To Susan Russel On Assurance

by Jerry Moon



Ellen White

On December 7, 1862, Ellen White wrote a letter of encouragement to Susan G. Russell, a young woman dying of tuberculosis, who was afraid the Holy Spirit had left her. Portions of the letter are excerpted in the devotional book, *In Heavenly Places*.

A soul whom God had forsaken would never feel as you have felt and would never love the truth and salvation as you have loved it. Oh, if God's Spirit ceases to strive with a soul it is left in an indifferent state, and all the time thinks that it is well enough off. . . . You must not gratify the enemy in the least by doubting and casting away your confidence. *Said the angel, 'God leaves not His people, even if they err. He turns not from them in wrath for any light thing. If they sin they have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous' [1 John 2:1].*

This Advocate pleads for sinners and the Father accepts His prayer. He turns not away the request of His beloved Son. *He who so loved you as to give His own life for you will not turn you off and forsake you unless you willfully, determinedly forsake Him to serve the world and Satan. Jesus loves to have you come to Him just as you are, hopeless and helpless, and cast yourself upon His all-abundant mercy and believe that He will receive you just as you are.*

You dwell upon the dark side. You must turn your mind away, and *instead of thinking all the time upon the wrath of God, think of His abundant mercy*, His willingness to save poor sinners, and then *believe He saves you*. You must in the name of God break this spell that is upon you. You must cry out, "I will, I do believe!" Jesus retains your name upon His breastplate and pleads for you before His Father, and if your eyes could be opened you would see heavenly angels ministering unto you, hovering about and driving back the evil angels that they should not utterly destroy. . . .

God calls upon you to believe. Heed His voice. Cease talking of the wrath of God and talk of His compassion and His abundant mercy. Jesus sits as a refiner and purifier of silver. The furnace in which you may be placed may be very hot, yet you will come forth as gold seven times purified, reflecting the image of Jesus. Have courage. Look up, believe, and you shall see of the salvation of God.

(Ellen White, *In Heavenly Places*, 119, emphasis supplied)

Points Of Interest

- *This is quite early in Ellen White's career.* She was only 35 when she wrote this letter. She is especially noted for her writings on salvation by faith in and after 1888. But this letter shows that she believed in salvation by faith and biblical assurance many years before she wrote her best known writings on the subject, including *Steps to Christ*, *Desire of Ages*, and *Christ's Object Lessons*.
- She specifically calls on Susan Russell to *choose where she will focus her thoughts*. Instead of thinking and talking "on the dark side" about the wrath of God, she should deliberately refocus her thoughts on God's love, his "all-abundant mercy," and his trustworthiness to save all who give themselves to Him. In other words, she calls on Russell to recognize the difference between her subjective feelings about God and the objective facts about God. It is true that there is such a thing as the wrath of God, but only for those who reject him, not for those who follow him.
- Ellen White makes a *clear distinction* between "any light thing"—spiritual stumbling by those whose hearts are set on God—and the willful, determined choice to forsake God and serve the world and Satan.
- Ellen White calls on Russell to "believe He saves you," i.e., believe that she presently has salvation in Jesus.

Posted by David Hamstra on July 14, 2010 in [Adventist Studies](#), [Quotable](#) | [Permalink](#)

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In this letter Ellen White is making strong arguments for the lost sinner "to believe" that God still loves them and is still reaching out to save them.

The appeal is to the lost to take courage and accept Christ's drawing them (I will draw all unto Me John 12:32) etc.

When speaking of the assurance of salvation we are looking for something like "you are saved" and "you know that you are born again, saved, accepted of God because you have".

This is missing from the letter.

Romans 8:16 has it - "the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we ARE the children of God". So that is an appeal to a real living "experience".

We also have it in 1T 158-164 (1857 Testimony #4 "Young Sabbathkeepers") - about 10 years before the letter to Susan.

"A supposed hope and nothing more will prove your ruin". p.163

"Determine to know the worst of your case. Ascertain IF you have an inheritance on high. Deal truly with your own soul...Remain (in prayer) before God UNTIL unutterable longings are begotten within you for salvation, AND the sweet EVIDENCE is obtained of pardoned sin". p.163

That is how Ellen White wrote about the "Assurance of salvation" rather than simply "the continued offer of salvation to the lost".

in Christ,

Bob

Posted by: BobRyan | [July 14, 2010 at 07:39 AM](#)

Good points, Bob. But I think the key to this letter is that Ellen White did not understand Susan to be lost. She said, "Jesus retains your name upon His breastplate and pleads for you before His Father . . ."

In other words, Ellen was appealing to Susan to believe on the basis of her continued status of being saved, not just that if she were to become lost, she could be saved again. When Ellen White says, "A soul whom God had forsaken would never feel as you have felt," she is talking about assurance that we remain saved even though we may not always feel like it. Her counsel to someone in that situation is to refocus the thoughts from Gods' wrath to belief on God's mercy.

That sounds like sound teaching on assurance to me.

Posted by: [David Hamstra](#) | [July 14, 2010 at 08:16 AM](#)

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