

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE IN THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

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Recently the subject of inspiration has received increased attention among Seventh-day Adventists. A growing number of believers are beginning to realize that one's view of the inspiration of the Bible has far reaching implications for one's daily decisions and lifestyle.

All Seventh-day Adventists believe the Biblical teaching on the Sabbath and what happens when one dies. All believe that they have a special mission in calling people to the true worship of God. All believe that the body is the temple of God. All believe women should serve God.

But beyond the general themes there is not as much consensus. It is here that the specific view of the inspiration of the Bible makes a significant difference in how its directives are applied to the life. When confronted with the biblical text that addresses specifics not many Seventh-day Adventists would say, "I don't *believe* what Scripture says there!"

Instead, there is a reason, a context, a cultural/or "for those times" consideration cited. It is not so much that there is a *base disbelief in Scripture*, but an interpretive difference at the root of all Christian controversy. It is precisely here where deep hermeneutical differences divide all Christian groups. As some Seventh-day Adventists seem increasingly uncertain about which hermeneutical tools are appropriate, there is the potential for an

ever-increasing number of tensions and conflicts among us. Fundamental to all schism is the question of inspiration, the age-old: "How Readest Thou?"

Ellen White, largely regarded by Adventists as a prophetess, has provided important insights on the value and interpretation of Scripture throughout her life. In this article I investigate Ellen White's views of inspiration. She had very definite ideas on the inspiration of the Bible and its implications for everyday living. My research has analyzed all her references to inspiration as retrieved by a CD-ROM from all her published works.

I will deal with questions like "What is the relationship between the Bible and inspiration?" "What is the nature of inspiration?" "How does Biblical inspiration function?" "What are the unique characteristics of inspiration?" "What are its functions?" "What are the evidences of Biblical inspiration?" "How does doubt effect one's view of inspiration?" "What are erroneous views and attitudes on inspiration, and how should we study the subject of inspiration?"

The Bible and Inspiration

The inspiration of human beings by God made the Bible what God intended it to be—*His* unique Word. Towards the end of her life, commenting on the efficacy of Scripture, Ellen White calls the inspiration of the Word: God's great work. Says she, God "does not design to add a new element of efficiency to his Word; He has done His great work in giving His inspiration to the Word."¹

Throughout her life she saw an intimate relation between the Bible and inspiration. She equates the Bible with "inspiration,"² the "Word of inspiration,"³ "words of inspiration,"⁴ the "volume of inspiration,"⁵ the "testimony of inspiration,"⁶ the "great treasure house of inspired truth,"⁷ and the "test of all inspiration."⁸

We will now investigate her views on the nature of inspiration.

The Nature of Inspiration

What is the nature of inspiration? How does it affect different people and what is the process by which it operates? Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Bible writers were inspired when they wrote. Consequently, they reject the idea of degrees of inspiration

which implies that some parts of Scripture are less inspired than others. They hold that the whole Bible is fully inspired. In this they have accepted the position that Ellen White took in opposition to the theory of degrees of inspiration when it was introduced among Adventists in the 1880's.

However, Ellen White makes a distinction between biblical prophets who spoke by "direct inspiration" and teachers in the schools of the prophets who were not directly inspired. She comments: "In the highest sense the prophet was one who spoke by direct inspiration, communicating to the people the messages he had received from God. But the name [prophet] was given also to those who, though not so directly inspired, were divinely called to instruct the people in the works and ways of God. For the training of such a class of teachers, Samuel, by the Lord's direction, established the schools of the prophets."⁹

Bible writers who spoke by "direct inspiration" are inspired in the "fullest sense of the word." When asked whether the Adventist pioneers were inspired by God, she answered, "I dare not say they were not led of God, for Christ leads into all truth; but when it comes to inspiration in the fullest sense of the word, I answer, No."¹⁰

Today, Bible students frequently classify these two groups under the categories of inspiration and illumination. Following this arrangement, Bible writers fall under the category of inspiration, all others under illumination. Ellen White does not use this terminology but employs "inspiration" and "illumination" as synonyms.¹¹ In most cases when she applies the word "illumination" to Bible writers, she describes them not simply as having "illumination" but "special illumination."¹²

Since our concern is with the nature of biblical inspiration, we move now to address these questions: How did Ellen White view inspiration as it worked in the divinely qualified writers of Scripture?

The Process of Biblical Inspiration. Ellen White describes the inspiration of the Bible as a process by which the utterances of humans become the word of God. Key elements in this process are God's inspiration of all Scripture, the incarnation of the Word, the

role of the Holy Spirit and the transformation of human words into the Word of God.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Ellen White frequently asserts that the Scriptures are “given by inspiration of God”. She writes: “The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all ‘given by inspiration of God’ (2 Tim 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men.”¹³

In contrast to common practice today, she avoids calling the writers of the various Bible books “authors.” Her focus remains on God as the sole Author of the Scriptures while the humans involved without exception are described as writers, not authors. This is fully in harmony with her general purpose to present the Bible as the inspired Word of God.

The Word was made flesh. Ellen White perceives from the incarnate nature of Christ, (“the Word was made flesh,” John 1:14) far-reaching theological implications for the written Word. She reasons that, as Christ’s nature is made up of a union of the divine and the human, so also is the nature of the Bible. The rationale for this divine-human nature is God’s attempt to adapt the Word of God to human needs. The following comment succinctly expresses her view:

The union of the divine and the human, manifest in Christ, exists also in the Bible. The truths revealed are all “given by inspiration of God;” yet they are expressed in the words of men and are adapted to human needs. Thus it may be said of the Book of God, as it was of Christ, that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” And this fact, so far from being an argument against the Bible, should strengthen faith in it as the word of God.”¹⁴

This is why she can describe the Bible as the embodiment of divine thought in “human language.”¹⁵

What impact did this divine-human union have on the language of the Bible? Was it written in superhuman language? Ellen White denies this, because “the Bible was written for practical purposes.” She explains: “Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are

expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea."¹⁶

Is the language of Scripture God's mode of thought and expression? Again Ellen White would answer "No." Its language is "that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen."¹⁷

In spite of the limitations and the imperfections of the human writers and language, God accomplished His purpose. "The Lord," she remarks, "gave His word in just the way He wanted it to come." Using an illustration from nature, she says, "There is variety in a tree, there are scarcely two leaves just alike. Yet this variety adds to the perfection of the tree as a whole."¹⁸

The role of the Holy Spirit. The process of inspiration involves the Godhead and especially the Holy Spirit. In describing the inspiration of Bible writers Ellen White states, "They were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). She does not limit this moving by the Spirit solely to the giving of prophecy as has been suggested recently,¹⁹ but applies it to the impartation of the whole Bible. She writes, "The Bible was written by men who were moved by the Holy Ghost."²⁰ "The Infinite One by his Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of his servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures."²¹

Angels of God are closely associated with the Holy Spirit in the process of inspiration. Their function is to shed light on the person who is under inspiration.²²

The role of the Spirit in inspiring the Bible writers can be described as follows: He is responsible for communicating specific messages to the writers as well as how they are to express it. In this process His purpose is to so hide the writer in Christ that he recedes into the background and God and His message are exalted. Says she: "The Holy Spirit has so shaped matters, both in the giving of the prophecy, and in the events portrayed, as to teach that the human agent is to be kept out of sight, hid in Christ, and the Lord God of heaven and His law are to be exalted."²³

In communicating truth there is a fine balance between the actions of the Holy Spirit and human freedom. Ellen White says,

the Holy Spirit expresses truth "according to the development" of the writer's mind but without the mind being "cramped, as if forced into a certain mold."²⁴

Human words transformed into the Word of God. Although it is abundantly clear that Ellen White considers the Bible the inspired Word of God, she points out that it is "not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired." "Inspiration," she says, "acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind." The end product is amazing: "The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God."²⁵ Thus human words become God's Word.

Lifestyle and Inspiration. What kind of persons were directly inspired? What was their lifestyle? How perfect were they?

Bible characters were not infallible. Throughout the Scripture the uniform testimony is that its writers were not infallible persons. They had weaknesses inherent with fallen human nature. For example, Peter revealed a hypocritical attitude for which Paul strongly rebuked him (Gal 2:11, 12). In another instance James gave Paul the unfortunate advice that was largely responsible for bringing about Paul's first Roman imprisonment (Acts 21:20-26).²⁶ David committed adultery and murder, and God would not even allow him to build His temple. Solomon had his years of blatant backsliding. Yet these were Bible writers. But because their opinions and lifestyle proved at times to be biased or immoral should their writings be disqualified?

What were the circumstances under which they sometimes erred or sinned? It is possible that their failures occurred when they were not under the direct influence of the Spirit's inspiration.

Inspiration guarantees trustworthy Scripture. A very natural question is: How human beings, who by nature are fallible, could possibly speak or write things that would be considered the infallible word of God? One might address this question in another way: Are there circumstances under which fallible Bible characters could speak or write truth without error? Ellen White replies with a resounding "Yes"!

The circumstance under which a Bible writer could present messages without error was when he was under the direct influence of the Spirit of the Lord. When the otherwise fallible Jacob came to the end of his life, he prophesied under "the spirit of inspiration." The result was, Ellen White says, that he disclosed with amazing accuracy before his sons "their past life, and their future history, revealing the purposes of God in regard to them."²⁷

It is, therefore, clear that Bible writers themselves were not infallible but subject to the inherent weaknesses of their fallen human nature. Yet when under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they presented a message that was fully trustworthy and without error.

The Importance of Understanding Inspiration

As discussed earlier, the day to day decisions most believers make on the basis of the Bible depends, to a great extent, on their view of inspiration and more particular on their ability or failure to understand inspiration's unique characteristics and function. We will first focus on Ellen White's views of the characteristics of inspiration, then its function.

Characteristics of Biblical Inspiration. What are the specific characteristics of "direct inspiration"? What is the effect of inspiration on the Bible? How does it affect the Bible's accuracy and trustworthiness? How does inspiration communicate God's voice?

It is accurate and fully trustworthy. To what extent can the Bible be trusted? Is it accurate? Did the writers make mistakes or errors? These are questions that occupy the minds of many. The measure of assurance they have about these questions determines some people's ability to believe in God; some have rejected Christianity altogether over such issues. Beyond basic belief, a person's commitment to following specific counsels and requirements of Scriptures is affected by his/her perception of trustworthiness. We could say that believers' confidence in God is in direct proportion to their confidence in the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Ellen White gives resounding assurance that the Scriptures can be *fully* trusted. Her message is clear: The Bible is the *infallible* Word of God. She wholeheartedly endorses "the grand principle" held by the Waldenses, Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Zwingli, and other

reformers on "the infallible authority of the Holy Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice."²⁸

In response to the question about the possibility of mistakes by copyists or translators, she says: "This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God." "Yes," she adds, "they would just as easily stumble over plain facts that the common mind will accept." She assures believers that "all the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth."²⁹

Ellen White points out that in the transmission of the text, attempts were made at times to improve the text, but these changes were not for the better: "When copies of it [Bible] were few, learned men had in some instances changed the words, thinking that they were making it more plain, when in reality they were mystifying that which was plain, by causing it to lean to their established views, which were governed by tradition."³⁰ In her remarks Ellen White does not clearly state that the Bible contains mistakes, she only refers to the "possibility or probability" of mistakes through copying and translating, and indicates that in some cases the obvious meaning of the text through changes has become more difficult to understand. Never, however, in her writings does she make the slightest allusion to the idea that the Bible writers themselves made mistakes.

In assuring the total trustworthiness of the biblical record, Ellen White affirms that it is a product of "the unerring pen of inspiration."³¹ Consequently "it never makes a mistake."³² The Bible "is infallible," she says, "for God cannot err."³³ Believers, therefore, can be fully confident that "in the Bible we have the unerring counsel of God."³⁴

At a time when more and more people feel that everything they read is biased and that objectivity is impossible, it is refreshing to know that an accurate and unbiased source of information is available in the Bible.

Often biographies of Christians portray practically faultless characters. Such shine as examples of immaculate piety and fail to

reveal that these are, in fact, erring human beings subject to our common temptations. The inherent weakness of these biographies or autobiographies is that "it is next to a human impossibility to lay open our faults for the possible inspection of our friends."³⁵ Minds "are so subject to prejudice that it is not possible for human histories to be absolutely impartial."³⁶ Thus such histories always reveal human biases.

By contrast, Ellen White assures us that the histories in the Bible have the unique quality of being "absolutely impartial." She writes that through inspiration we have a faithful record of "the faults of good men, those who were distinguished by the favor of God; indeed, their faults are more fully presented than their virtues." How did the inspired writers obtain these accurate historical records? Says she, "The scribes of God wrote as they were dictated by the Holy Spirit, having no control of the work themselves."³⁷ No wonder that she could write that in the Bible "only can we find a history of our race unsullied by human prejudice or human pride."³⁸

"One of the best evidences of the authority of the Scriptures," Ellen White says, is that "the truth is not glossed over, nor the sins of its chief characters suppressed."³⁹ She adds that "had the Bible been written by uninspired persons, it would no doubt have presented the character of its honored men in a more flattering light. But as it is, we have a correct record of their experiences."⁴⁰

The question inevitably arises, How is it humanly possible to be absolutely impartial? It is here where the unique character of inspiration plays such a crucial role. She points out that through divine inspiration the Bible writer, "lifted above the weaknesses of humanity, tells the simple, naked truth."⁴¹ From a human perspective it is impossible to reach this level of precision. It is only those who experience divine inspiration in the "fullest sense of the word"⁴² who are able to produce unbiased, unerring accounts. It is this quality of reporting under the full control of the Holy Spirit that validates the Scriptures.

Divine inspiration forms the basis for the assuring promise: "the Word of God is given as a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path" (Ps 119:105). Ellen White cites its relevance for discovering prehistoric mysteries as well as the future. "Inspiration," she

states, "in giving us the history of the Flood, has explained wonderful mysteries, that geology, independent of inspiration, never could."⁴³ At the same time Bible prophecy accurately portrays the future, often in great detail.⁴⁴

Inspiration is one key that leads to the discovery of harmony between science and the Bible. Science, independent of God, she says is "pretentious ignorance" which has a "deceptive power" that "has captivated and enslaved the minds of many." But "true science and inspiration are in perfect harmony."⁴⁵

Her personal testimony on the absolute trustworthiness of the Bible is simple and straightforward: "I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word. I believe its utterances in an entire Bible."⁴⁶ "The Word of God is infallible, accept it as it reads."⁴⁷

It is God's voice speaking to the soul. The testimony of inspired writings has the unique characteristic of being the voice of God. This quality makes Scripture of vital importance for believers who desire to discover God's will for their lives. "Search the Scriptures," she says, "for therein is the counsel of God, the voice of God speaking to the soul."⁴⁸ Daily we need to learn "from the word of God, which is the man of our counsel."⁴⁹ Through the Bible God leads us to our full potential. "The word of God is like a treasure house, containing everything that is essential to perfect the man of God."⁵⁰

Inspired Scripture provides a sufficient rule of faith and practice under all circumstances. "The teaching of this Word is exactly that needed in all circumstances in which we may be placed. It is a sufficient rule of faith and practise; for it is the voice of God speaking to the soul, giving the members of his family directions for keeping the heart with all diligence."⁵¹

Consequently Scripture, being the voice of God, is the best source of counsel. Instead of depending on church leadership to settle minor and major matters, she encourages believers to carry these things to God. "The Lord can be approached by all" she says. "He is much more accessible than the president of the General Conference." "Lead these men who have ability and talent to look to God, that they may be taught by Him. Teach them to go to the Fountainhead for instruction in righteousness." Because "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," she asks, "What then, is your

excuse for turning for counsel from One who is infinite in wisdom to finite men, who are as weak as yourselves? One has suffered for you, the Just for the unjust."⁵²

It presents the Bible as a self-interpreting book. Inspiration sets Scripture apart from other books, making it a category by itself and containing its own principles of interpretation. "The Bible is its own expositor," Ellen White explains. "One passage will prove to be a key that will unlock other passages, and in this way light will be shed upon the hidden meaning of the word. By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident."⁵³

This important characteristic of inspiration has made the Bible a book that the uneducated can comprehend as well as the educated. Ellen White writes: "The words of inspiration are so plain that the unlearned may understand them."⁵⁴ "Take the Bible as your study-book. All can understand its instruction."⁵⁵

Functions of Inspiration. Inspiration has several vital functions to perform that are indispensable for believers who are preparing for the return of the Lord. These functions can be grouped into five categories: Revealing God's character, perfecting the character of His people, making every Bible passage profitable, pointing out human limitations and providing a foundation for Christian education.

To reveal God's character. An important purpose of inspiration is to reveal God. Ellen White points out that God has revealed Himself in two ways: "Through the volume of inspiration"—the Scriptures—and through "the book of nature "which is shown in the "works of creation."⁵⁶ It is in the Bible that God's character is most clearly portrayed.

Inspiration is also instrumental in revealing the presence and character of God's Son throughout the OT. This is especially seen in the way NT writers, through inspiration, bring out an abundance of new insights about Christ in the OT prophecies.⁵⁷

To perfect the character of God's people. Ellen White frequently refers to the role of inspired Scripture in the development of a perfect character. She states that "'Given by inspiration of God,' able to make us 'wise unto salvation,' rendering the man of God

'perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works' (2 Tim 3:15-17), the Bible has the highest claim to our reverent attention."⁵⁸

Commenting on 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works," she says: "In the Word of God is contained everything essential to the perfecting of the man of God. It is like a treasure-house, full of valuable and precious stores; but we do not appreciate its riches, nor realize the necessity of equipping ourselves with the treasures of truth."⁵⁹ "Its teaching will perfect in each individual a character that God can approve."⁶⁰ "Those who are defective in character, in conduct, in habits and practices, are to take heed to counsel and reproof."⁶¹

To make the Bible profitable. As the whole Bible is given by inspiration of God, every part of it is profitable. This implies that "the Old Testament no less than the New should receive attention. As we study the Old Testament we shall find living springs bubbling up where the careless reader discerns only a desert."⁶²

How profitable are the accounts of Noah, Lot, Moses, Abraham, David, Solomon, Elijah, Jonah, Peter, Paul, Barnabas and others when all their faults and follies are recorded by "the pen of Inspiration"? The faithful portrayal of their failures and victories is given for our encouragement. Their experiences are intended as "a lesson to all the generations following them." Without this record of their weaknesses these heroes of faith "would have been more than human, and our sinful natures would despair of ever reaching such a point of excellence. But seeing where they struggled and fell, where they took heart again and conquered through the grace of God, we are encouraged, and led to press over the obstacles that degenerate nature places in our way."⁶³

So profitable and far-reaching does she see the Bible's inspired teachings that, "practically carried out," they "will fit men for any position of duty."⁶⁴ She encourages believers in the daily study of the Scriptures, like the Bereans, to develop competence in using the words of inspiration, so that in confronting opposition we "like Christ," can meet "scripture with scripture."⁶⁵

To provide the foundation for Christian education. Ellen White's interest in Christian education led her to emphasize the

role of the inspired Word of God in schools. In commenting on the usefulness of inspired writings versus secular text books, she says, "To discard many of the worldly text-books will not lower the standard of education, but will raise it to a higher plane." Commenting on 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 she remarks, "If this is the breadth and depth of the Scriptures, shall we not lift the standard by making the word of God the foundation of our system of education?"⁶⁶ She deplored at one time the lack of prominence the Bible received in the church's schools: "The Lord has been greatly dishonored in our institutions of learning when His Word has been made only a book among books. The very Book that contains infallible wisdom has scarcely been opened as a study book. . . ."⁶⁷

Evidences of Divine Inspiration

What is the evidence for the inspiration of the Scriptures? The evidences are seen in the biblical records themselves. Diligent study of the Bible results in the clearest conviction of its inspiration. Ellen White's major references to proofs of inspiration pertain to the mysteries and difficulties of the Bible, the magnificence of its themes, its prophecies and the unity of the Old and New Testaments.

"Divine inspiration" Ellen White writes, "asks many questions which the most profound scholar cannot answer. These questions were not asked that we might answer them, but to call our attention to the deep mysteries of God and to teach us that our wisdom is limited; that in the surroundings of our daily life there are many things beyond the comprehension of finite beings."⁶⁸

Skeptics in their arguments against the inspiration of the Bible frequently point to the difficulties in the Bible. In response Ellen White observes that "the mysteries of the Bible, so far from being an argument against it, are among the strongest evidences of its divine inspiration." She adds that "if it contained no account of God but that which we could comprehend; if His greatness and majesty could be grasped by finite minds, then the Bible would not, as now, bear the unmistakable evidences of divinity."⁶⁹

She refers to Peter's statement that there are in Scripture "things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest . . . unto their own destruction." These difficulties,

she says, "constitute a strong evidence of its divine inspiration."⁷⁰ Thus instead of weakening our faith "the greatness of its themes should inspire faith in it as the word of God."⁷¹

The fulfillment of prophecy she presents as another evidence of the Bible's divine inspiration. Reports of the exact, historical fulfillment of prophecies have been instrumental in convincing skeptics and rationalists of the inspiration of the Bible.⁷²

A careful study of the link between the Old and New Testaments gives additional proof of inspiration. "The more we study the Old and New Testaments," she states, "the more we shall have impressed on our mind the fact that each sustains a very close relation to the other, and the more evidence we shall receive of their divine inspiration. We shall see clearly that they have but one Author."⁷³

Doubting the Inspiration of Scripture

The evidences of divine inspiration are abundant. Yet despite this many have difficulties in accepting the Bible as the true Word of God. Their minds are filled with questions and doubts. Why is there such a lack of conviction about the inspiration of the Bible? What are the deeper reasons for doubting inspiration? What are its results?

Causes for Doubting. Before dealing with the precise reasons for doubting the inspiration of the Bible we should recall that God, in His great love for humans, has given them the freedom of choice. This is a fundamental principle of the Christian faith. Ellen White states clearly the choice that God gives: "Those who think it a virtue to quibble can have plenty of room to disbelieve the inspiration and truths of God's word. God does not compel any to believe. They can choose to rely upon the evidences He has been pleased to give, or doubt, and cavil, and perish."⁷⁴

What are the reasons for doubt? Primarily, she says, they are related to people's relationship with God in terms of their attitudes and lifestyle. The difficulties about inspiration are not so much with by the Bible "as with their own hearts." The problem, she says, is that "the requirements of God's word are too close for their un-sanctified natures. 'The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be' [Rom 8:7]."

When the natural heart is not subjected to "the sanctifying influence of the grace of God received through the channel of faith, the thoughts of the heart are not pure and holy."⁷⁵

Foremost responsible for doubt, therefore, is the cherishing of sin in the life. She observes that "those who love sin will turn away from the Bible, will love to doubt, and will become reckless in principle. They will receive and advocate false theories."⁷⁶ "Those who have an evil heart of unbelief, will doubt, and will think it noble and a virtue to doubt the word of God."⁷⁷

The underlying cause that fuels doubt is an unchristian lifestyle. "In almost every case, where persons become unsettled in regard to the inspiration of the word of God, it is on account of their unsanctified lives, which that word condemns. They will not receive its reproofs and threatenings because these reflect upon their wrong course of action."⁷⁸

Finally she points to the absence of Christian virtues among believers as a cause for doubt. The lack of the grace of God, forbearance, patience, spirit of consecration and sacrifice, devotion, personal piety and holiness is frequently "the only reason why some are doubting the evidences of God's word."⁷⁹

Results of Doubting. Ellen White vividly portrays the baneful consequence of the course of doubt. Doubt results in "lessening faith in the inspiration of the Bible."⁸⁰ It has a devastating influence on the mind and brings the doubter into the presence of evil angels.⁸¹ She warns against expressing even a single word of doubt for it will do its damage. Satan will use it to "encourage skepticism" and turn believers "from the narrow path that leads to heaven." Suggestions of doubt, therefore, "weaken faith" and "confuse the perception of truth."⁸²

Having started on the path of doubt, sceptics substitute the plain authoritative "Thus says the Lord" for "some winding sophistry of error." Instead of "the call of the Good Shepherd" they "follow the voice of strangers." Thus "infidelity has increased in proportion as men have questioned the word and requirements of their Maker."⁸³

Doubters of inspiration are not satisfied to keep their thoughts to themselves. They are caught in an evangelistic zeal to spread their doubts and their questionings that will diminish faith in

inspiration and make “shipwreck of the happiness of their fellow-men.” Their zeal is in proportion to the amount of error they have imbibed: “The more they drifted into error, the greater grew their desire to draw other souls into the same channel of darkness.”⁸⁴

Protection against Doubts. As in nearly every case an “unsanctified” lifestyle causes people to doubt inspiration, it follows that practicing the biblical lifestyle is the antidote to doubt. Ellen White writes, “Difficulties and doubts which perplex the vicious heart will be cleared away before the one practicing the pure principles of truth.”⁸⁵

Purity of lifestyle Ellen White sees as the best way to protect believers against doubting inspiration: “Purity of life imparts refinement, which will lead those possessing it to shrink more and more from coarseness and indulgence in sin. Such will not be led away from the truth or be given up to doubt the inspiration of the word of God.” But protection is not the only benefit. As a result of a pure lifestyle, they become a witness to the positive influence of inspiration: “They will engage in the daily study of the sacred word with ever-increasing interest, and the evidences of Christianity and inspiration will stamp their impress on the mind and life.”⁸⁶

In demonstrating what the study of the Bible can do to one’s views of inspiration, Ellen White refers to William Miller. Here was a deist with no faith in the Scriptures, who, after a thorough study became fully convinced they were divinely inspired. This discovery had such an impact that it influenced the rest of his life, and he became God’s special instrument in drawing the attention of the world to Christ’s soon return.⁸⁷

As a further protection against views that undermine confidence in inspiration, Ellen White calls for the establishment of denominational schools. “If we do not have schools for our youth,” she says, “they will attend other seminaries and colleges, and will be exposed to infidel sentiments, to cavilings and questionings concerning the inspiration of the Bible.”⁸⁸ This implies a grave responsibility to guard the Adventist educational system from unbiblical sentiments about inspiration. If this fails, church-related schools will be a danger instead of a blessing.

Finally, she warns against ministers who express doubts about the inspiration of the Bible. “I saw that however strongly men may

have advocated the truth, however pious they may appear to be, when they begin to talk unbelief in regard to some scriptures, claiming that they cause them to doubt the inspiration of the Bible, we should be afraid of them, for God is at a great distance from them."⁸⁹

Erroneous Views on Inspiration

There exist several views of inspiration. Each view, however, has a significant influence on the lifestyle of believers. What kinds of erroneous views and practices regarding inspiration does Ellen White especially warn against? What are the causes for these views? What are their results, and what impact do they have on Scripture?

A mix of inspired and uninspired writings. In 1884 a series of article in the *Review and Herald* advocated the idea that some things in the Scriptures are inspired and some not.⁹⁰ This view was endorsed and promoted by both the Battle Creek church and the college which was responsible for the training of church workers.

Ellen White strongly opposed this new view. Instead of providing new insights on inspiration, it did not have God's approval, because it criticized the Word of God. She explained: "God sets no man to pronounce judgment on His Word, selecting some things as inspired and discrediting others as uninspired."⁹¹ Supporters of this view were walking on holy ground and "had better fear and tremble and hide their wisdom as foolishness."⁹² Instead of being guided by Jesus, she said, "they have stepped before Jesus to show Him a better way than He has led us."⁹³

Some found evidence for a partial inspiration of the Bible in the text by the translation rendered "All scripture given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim 3:16). This did not mean, she explained, that there is some Scripture that is not inspired. The text refers to the whole Bible. "The apostle means simply 'I present to you the Living Oracles, the Scriptures, all given by inspiration of God, . . .'"⁹⁴

In her defence of the Bible Ellen White places the Word of God above criticism. "In giving the word," she writes, "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' The word was not given at the option of men, and the use to be made of it is not left to their option. Men may not dissect or pronounce upon, wrest or

misinterpret, take from or cast aside, any portion of that word according to their own judgment." Calling attention to its divine origin and thought, she says, "Although its compilation, preservation, and transmission have been committed to men, it is wholly divine in its origin and in the thoughts expressed. It may not be demerited and pronounced upon by finite minds, because of its transmission through human agents."⁹⁵

Sources influence the quality of inspiration. Some entertain the idea that a non-inspired source of information from which the inspired writer may derive some information affects the quality of inspiration. This view Ellen White also rejects. The Bible writings are fully inspired no matter from what sources the writers may obtain some of their materials. Referring to Paul's admonitions based on reports from the family of Chloe, she asks, whether Paul who "was to watch for souls as one that must render account to God," should "not take notice of the reports concerning their state of anarchy and division?" She answers "Most assuredly; and the reproof he sent them was written just as much under the inspiration of the Spirit of God as were any of his epistles." Those who refused his testimony "took the position that God had not spoken to them through Paul, that he had merely given them his opinion as a man, and they regarded their own judgment as good as that of Paul."⁹⁶ Thus God's inspired message was made of none effect.

Causes of the erroneous views and attitudes. The problem with those who designate some sections of the Bible as divine and others as human is that they fail to understand its divine nature. Ellen White observes that they neglect to see that "Christ, the divine, partook of our human nature, that He might reach humanity. In the work of God for man's redemption, divinity and humanity are combined."⁹⁷ As it is not possible and profitable to unravel the mystery of the divine-human nature of Christ, *so humans should avoid attempting to distinguish between divine and human aspects in Scripture.*

Low views of inspiration are also caused by exalting human ideas and talents above divine wisdom and "forms and science, so-called, above the power of vital godliness."⁹⁸

The results of the erroneous views. The heretical views on inspiration that were introduced in the Adventist church in the

1880's had a subtle and far reaching, destructive influence. It impacted the 1886 General Conference in Oakland, Ellen White recounts, and "since then has been at work like leaven, and the very same prejudice and irritation of spirit that was upon the Pacific Coast in a degree we find this side of the Rocky Mountains," influencing the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference.⁹⁹ She portrayed the effect as "disastrous, both upon the one engaged in it and upon those who accept it as a work from God" and "skepticism has been aroused in many minds" as to the nature of inspiration. Advocates of these new theories she characterizes as "finite beings, with their narrow, short-sighted views." They are biased because they are "affected in a greater or less degree by surrounding influences, and having hereditary and cultivated tendencies which are far from making them wise or heavenly-minded." The detrimental results of their practice of judging the Scripture on "what is divine and what is human" is seen in a selective use of Scripture which views certain passages as important because they are inspired, while other texts are not so important because they are not inspired.¹⁰⁰

Ellen White very much deplored the publication of these ideas. "These sentiments should never have seen the light of day," she said because they "undermine all inspiration." She is even more distressed about the lack of spiritual discernment among the believers. "Have God's people put out their eyes," she asked, "that they cannot distinguish between truth and error, the sacred and the profane?"¹⁰¹ She foresaw a fearful harvest. Instead of being new light "it will lead many souls astray, and will be a savor of death to some."¹⁰²

Counsels on the Study of Inspiration

What recommendations does Ellen White have on the proper way to approach the subject of inspiration? What are the do's and don'ts? What are the proper methods and sources?

The Don'ts in the Study of Inspiration. A major warning is that humans are not authorized to analyze the Bible to determine what is inspired and what is not. Addressing the Adventist ministry she warns, "My brethren in the ministry. 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.'

[Exodus 3:5] There is no finite man that lives, I care not who he is or whatever is his position, that God has authorized to pick and choose in His Word."¹⁰³

In addition she warns not to make a distinction in Scripture between revelation and inspiration: "Do not let any living man come to you and begin to dissect God's Word, telling what is revelation, what is inspiration and what is not, without a rebuke. Tell all such they simply do not know."¹⁰⁴ The reason she gives is that humans "simply are not able to comprehend the things of the mystery of God."¹⁰⁵ Her strong objections are connected to the practical consequences of making such a distinction. It will tend to undermine people's faith in the entire Bible as it reads. She says, "What we want is to inspire faith. We want no one to say, 'This I will reject, and this will I receive,' but we want to have implicit faith in the Bible as a whole and as it is."¹⁰⁶

Finally she cautions against associating with ministers, no matter how godly they seem, who display doubt on the inspiration of Scripture.¹⁰⁷

The Do's in the Study of Inspiration. Christ's followers should approach the study of inspiration with a positive witness. In contrast to the views of low inspiration that exalt human ideas and talents, believers should affirm the divine inspiration of Scripture. "Let every one who believes in Jesus Christ," Ellen White says, "use his talent of voice in exalting Jesus and presenting testimonies that will magnify, honor, and adore the Word of God." The results of such a witness will be clearly visible for "the gospel makes itself known in its power in the consistent, holy, pure lives of those who are believers, hearers, and doers of the Word."¹⁰⁸

To better understand the words of inspiration Ellen White recommends the study of her writings to the church. Addressing believers, she says "you are not familiar with the Scriptures" and "have neglected to acquaint yourselves with God's inspired Book." 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."¹⁰⁹

As to the role of these testimonies, she states, that they are not intended "to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart

the truths of inspiration already revealed." She adds, "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."¹¹⁰

Conclusion

Ellen White's view of inspiration is in harmony with the high view of inspiration held by the Protestant Reformers who taught that the Bible, as the inspired Word of God, was the only infallible authority for faith and practice.

She saw inspiration as a process in which divine light was communicated to the human recipient and imparted to the people in a trustworthy manner. This process was a dynamic divine-human interaction in which the Holy Spirit moved upon the Bible writers. The style of the various Bible books reflects the individual writers who expressed the divine communications given by thoughts, dictations, visions, or dreams into human language. As weak and imperfect as these human beings and human language were, inspiration in the fullest sense of the word lifted these persons above their frailties so their human utterances became the infallible Word of God.

Biblical inspiration, therefore, makes the Bible God's special instrument for the salvation of humanity. It is His voice speaking to the soul, accurate and fully trustworthy; the infallible, unerring guide and rule for believers to lead them into a saving union with Christ and to assist them in a victorious lifestyle to prepare them to meet the Lord at His return.

It is not surprising that Satan's major target in the last days is the Scriptures. "Satan," she says, "is moving with his power from beneath to inspire men to form alliances and confederacies of evil against light and against the Word of God." One of the signs of the last days is the low views of inspiration and the exaltation of human ideas.¹¹¹

Stressing the seriousness of the situation for Seventh-day Adventists, Ellen White notes that it affects the very foundation of the Bible. She says: "Never was there a stronger combination formed to neutralize the lesson and teachings of Christ, and to sow

the seeds of infidelity in regard to the inspiration of the Scriptures and sap its very foundation."¹¹²

She challenges apathetic believers by saying, "It is time we were endowed with power from on high." Fearing for the ability of believers to resist the darkness that is coming upon the earth, she confronts them with the searching question; "Where is the light and the power which shall withstand this terrible incoming darkness which is covering the world like a funeral pall?"¹¹³

"One of the marked signs of the last days," she asserts, is that "human reasoning and the imaginings of the human heart" are "undermining the inspiration of the Word of God." "There are in many churches skepticism and infidelity in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Many, very many, are questioning the verity and truth of the Scriptures." As a result "that which should be received as granted, is surrounded with a cloud of mysticism. Nothing stands out in clear and distinct lines, upon rock bottom."¹¹⁴

Attempts to unsettle minds regarding the correct view of inspiration will spread, she says, "until we may see the full meaning of the words of Christ, 'When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?'" (Luke 18:8).¹¹⁵

Recent church publications reveal a trend to introduce new approaches to the topic of inspiration. Although written with a noble purpose of assisting perplexed believers and affirming the inspiration of the Scriptures, they seem to add to the confusion. These approaches present concepts or definitions of inspiration and revelation that are not supported by Ellen White. They are simply modifications of the attempts made during the 1880's to distinguish between the divine and human nature of the Bible—an approach she strongly opposed. As long as her views on this subject are not taken seriously, the disunity among believers will continue to grow with all its negative consequences.

An unfortunate by-product of the current confusion is its inevitable negative impact on the believers' confidence in the infallibility of the Bible, which in turn, weakens faith in its doctrines, including that of the assurance of salvation. Ellen White sees an intimate connection between the true view of inspiration, the infallibility of the Scriptures and the absolute confidence in the trustworthiness of its teachings. This, therefore, makes it of

paramount importance for church leaders to strive to uphold the true Biblical teaching of inspiration. It is vital to the believers' possession of the assurance of salvation and the effectiveness of their mission.

Endnotes

- 1 "Accepted in the Beloved," *Review and Herald*, October 15, 1908, p. 7.
- 2 *The Faith I Live By*, p. 116.
- 3 *Manuscript Releases*, 1:52.
- 4 *Gospel Workers*, (1892), p. 123. See also *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 351 on students' health and inspiration.
- 5 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 596.
- 6 *Great Controversy*, p. 341; *Spirit of Prophecy*, 4:211.
- 7 *Great Controversy*, p. 193; *Spirit of Prophecy*, 4:152.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Education*, p. 46.
- 10 "Open the Heart to Light," *Review and Herald*, March 25, 1890, p. 177; *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 34; *Evangelism*, p. 297.
- 11 See e.g. *Desire of Ages*, p. 464.
- 12 *Great Controversy*, p. 344; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 452.
- 13 *Great Controversy*, p. v; *The Faith I Live By*, p. 10; *Selected Messages* 1:25.
- 14 *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:747.
- 15 *Selected Messages*, 1:25.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 1:20.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 1:21. She also writes: "The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God's condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought. Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education. Sinful beings can only bear to look upon a shadow to the brightness of heaven's glory. *Ibid.*, 1:22.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 1:21.
- 19 See George E. Rice, *Luke, a Plagiarist?* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1983).
- 20 "Obedience the Fruit of Union with Christ—No. 1," *Review and Herald*, Aug. 27, 1901, p. 551. See also *SDA Bible Commentary*, 7:945; *Selected Messages*, 1:19, 20; "Christ Revealed the Father," *Review and Herald*, Jan. 7, 1890, p. 1; "The Parable of the Sower," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, Aug. 19, 1895, p. 239. The Bible, she says, "is the inspiration of One infallible, the divine communication to holy men of old, who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." "The Parable of the Sower," *Review and Herald* 10-03-99/07.
- 21 *Great Controversy*, p. v; *The Faith I Live By*, p. 10; *Selected Messages*, 1:25.
- 22 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 251.
- 23 *Evangelism*, p. 577.
- 24 *Selected Messages*, 1:22.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 1:21.
- 26 *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, p. 214; *Bible Commentary*, 6:1065.
- 27 *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:170. Other examples are Balaam, David and Solomon.
- 28 *Great Controversy*, p. 249. See also *ibid.* pp. 68, 102, 143, 173, 177, 238.
- 29 *Selected Messages*, 1:16.
- 30 *Early Writings*, p. 220-221.

- 31 "Jacob and Esau," *Signs of the Times*, April 17, 1879, p. 122.
- 32 *The Kress Collection*, p. 98.
- 33 *My Life Today*, p. 27.
- 34 *Testimonies*, 4:441. See also *Messages to Young People*, p. 443.
- 35 "Bible Biographies," *Review and Herald*, Jan. 22, 1880, p. 49.
- 36 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 238.
- 37 *Testimonies* 4:9. She also comments that the writings of the apostles were "dictated by the Holy Ghost" (*Spiritual Gifts* 1:176).
- 38 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 596.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 4:9; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 238.
- 40 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 238.
- 41 "Bible Biographies," *Review and Herald*, Jan. 22, 1880, p. 49.
- 42 *Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 547; *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 34.
- 43 *Lift Him Up*, p. 59. See also *Spirit of Prophecy*, 1:89; *Spiritual Gifts*, 3:94.
- 44 *Spirit of Prophecy*, 3:156, 160.
- 45 *Testimonies*, 4:584. See also *Messages to Young People*, p. 190.
- 46 *Selected Messages*, 1:17.
- 47 "The Tasmanian Campmeeting," *Review and Herald*, Feb. 11, 1896, p. 81.
- 48 *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 391. See *Kress Collection* 98.
- 49 *Kress Collection*, p. 98.
- 50 *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 123. In *Heavenly Places*, p. 133.
- 51 "The Word of God," *Review and Herald*, August 22, 1907, p. 8. She says, "The Bible is an infallible guide under all circumstances," *My Life Today*, p. 25.
- 52 *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 329-330.
- 53 "The Science of Salvation The First of Sciences," *Review and Herald*, December 1, 1891, p. 737.
- 54 *Gospel Workers*, (1892), p. 123.
- 55 *Gospel Workers*, (1915), p. 309.
- 56 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 596.
- 57 *Desire of Ages*, p. 413.
- 58 *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 139; *Messages to Young People*, p. 284.
- 59 "Benefits of Bible Study," *Bible Echo*, October 1, 1892, p. 290.
- 60 *Kress Collection*, p. 98.
- 61 "Words to the Young," *Youth's Instructor*, August 31, 1893, p. 276.
- 62 *Education*, p. 191.
- 63 *Testimonies*, 4:12. See also "Bible Biblebiographies," *Review and Herald*, January 22, 1880, p. 49.
- 64 *Testimonies*, 4:441.
- 65 *Gospel Workers*, pp. 92, 124.
- 66 "Instruction Regarding the School Work," *The General Conference Bulletin*, April 24, 1901, pp. 452, 453.
- 67 *Manuscript Releases*, 11:171. She says, "The word of God is the most perfect educational book in our world. Yet in our colleges and schools, books produced by human intellect have been presented for the study of our students, and the Book of books, which God has given to men to be an infallible guide, has been made a secondary matter. Human productions have been used as most essential and the word of God has been studied simply to give flavor to other studies." *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 394, 395.
- 68 *Ministry of Healing*, p. 431.
- 69 *Education*, p. 170.
- 70 *Testimonies*, 5:700; *Steps to Christ*, p. 107.
- 71 *Education*, p. 170.
- 72 *Great Controversy*, p. 364. Here she refers to Gausson's experience with reading the fulfillment of Daniel 2 in Rollin's *Ancient History*.
- 73 *Selected Messages*, 3:359.
- 74 *Spiritual Gifts*, 4b:123; *Testimonies*, 1:377.

- 75 *Testimonies*, 1:440.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 1:441.
- 77 *Spiritual Gifts*, 4b:123; *Testimonies*, 1:377.
- 78 *Testimonies*, 1:440. She adds: "Difficulties and doubts which perplex the vicious heart will be cleared away before the one practicing the pure principles of truth."
- 79 *Testimonies*, 1:383-384.
- 80 "The Faith that Will Stand the Test," *Review and Herald*, Jan. 10, 1888, p.18.
- 81 *Testimonies*, 1:427-428.
- 82 "The Faith that Will Stand the Test," *Review and Herald*, Jan. 10, 1888, p.18.
- 83 *Ibid.*
- 84 *Ibid.*
- 85 *Testimonies*, 1:440.
- 86 *Ibid.*, 1:441.
- 87 *Spirit of Prophecy*, 4:205.
- 88 *Special Testimonies on Education*, (1897), pp. 200-201.
- 89 *Testimonies*, 1:383-384.
- 90 G. I. B., "Inspiration: Its Nature and Manner of Communication," Nos 1-10 in *Review and Herald*, Jan. 8-June 3, 1884.
- 91 *Selected Messages*, 1:23. She adds that "the testimonies have been treated in the same way; but God is not in this."
- 92 *Ibid.*, 1:23.
- 93 *Ibid.*, 1:17.
- 94 "The Bible God's Inspired Word," *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, Aug. 26, 1895, p. 268. Emphasis hers.
- 95 *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times* 08-26-95/01.
- 96 *Testimonies*, 5:684.
- 97 *Ibid.*, 5:747.
- 98 *Manuscript Releases*, 2:104.
- 99 *1988 Materials*, pp. 187-188.
- 100 *Testimonies*, 5:709.
- 101 *1988 Materials*, p. 258.
- 102 *Manuscript Releases*, 7:382; *Manuscript Releases*, 12:367.
- 103 *Bible Commentary*, 7:919.
- 104 *Ibid.*
- 105 *Ibid.*
- 106 *Ibid.*
- 107 *Testimonies*, 1:383-384.
- 108 *That I May Know Him*, p. 345.
- 109 *Testimonies*, 2:605; *Ibid.*, 5:665.
- 110 *Ibid.*, 2:695; *Ibid.*, 5:665.
- 111 *That I May Know Him*, p. 345.
- 112 *Manuscript Releases*, 2:163.
- 113 *Ibid.*
- 114 *Selected Messages*, 1:15. See also *The Faith I Live By*, p. 13.
- 115 *Selected Messages*, 1:17.