

THE RELATIONSHIP OF ELLEN WHITE'S WRITINGS TO SCRIPTURE

A most basic question must be asked, what is the purpose for the writings of Ellen White? Are her writings to be used as an infallible interpreter of scripture or an exegetical commentary on the bible?

Let the prophetic voice speak for itself.

“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.” (5T 665)

“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.” (5T 663)

“The written testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed.” (5T 665)

“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.” (5T 665)

“If the people who now profess to be God’s peculiar treasure would obey His requirements, as specified in His word, special testimonies would not be given to awaken them to their duty and impress upon them their sinfulness and their fearful danger in neglecting to obey the word of God.” (5T 667)

“Brother J 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.” (4T 245)

Finally, a final purpose for her writings was to prepare a people for the final days of earth’s history.

“Repeatedly the word has come, write the things that I have given you to confirm the faith of my people in the position they have taken....The instruction in the early days of the message is to hold as safe instruction to follow in these its closing days” RH July 28, 1899

To summarize, the purpose her writings:

1. To exalt the bible and attract minds to it
2. To bring the people back to the word of God that they neglected to follow.
3. Impress truth already revealed.
4. Simply truth already given that no one will be without excuse.
5. To rebuke sin and warn of the danger of neglecting to obey the word of God.
6. To prepare a people for the final crisis and the coming of Jesus.

COUNCILS ON WRONG USE OF HER WRITINGS

Ellen White considered herself a messenger of the LORD, for her this covered a range of roles.

“.. I want it to be understood that I have no ambition to have the name of leader, or any other name that may be given me, except that of a messenger”. Manuscript Release Vol. 5, 439

She further states:

“Why have I not claimed to be a prophet?—Because in these days many who boldly claim that they are prophets are a reproach to the cause of Christ; and because my work includes much more than the word “prophet” signifies.” 1SM Bk. 1 pg. 32

The designated word Messenger for Ellen White covered various roles

Writer

Speaker

Evangelist

Councilor

Homilist

Expositor

TERMS DEFINED

Exposition is the study of the bible to determine what it has to say to us today. It is to take the text out of its historical setting and apply the principles to our time and place.

Homily is a method of using the bible for spiritual edification and not doctrinal instruction. It draws out principles from biblical narratives to apply to our modern day time and place.

Exegesis is the study of the bible to determine what the bible authors were seeking to communicate to their original audiences. It is critically important to understand that establishing or teaching doctrine of scripture, the text must be explained exegetically as to its original meaning. Exegesis draws out the hidden meaning of the text.

Ellen White was not a theologian or an exegete. Therefore her writings are not to be used as an interpreter of scripture. If this is done it is tantamount to giving to her writings complete interpretive control over the entire bible. This would make her the final authority.

Ellen White's writings are primarily expository and homiletical. She was not an exegete who draws out the original meaning of the text.

A TEST CASE

In 1 Cor. 2:v9 Paul writes “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” In G.C. Page 674, Ellen White applies v9 to the glories of the new earth, but what was Paul's meaning when he wrote this letter to the church at Corinth?

Let us exegete the text.

RULE 1 – THE LITERARY CONTEXT

Read v9 within the context of verses 1-8.

Paul speaks of man's wisdom in verses 1-5. Then verses 6 and 7, he speaks about the wisdom of God “in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.” Contextually verses 6 and 7 are the subject of Paul's discussion that bears direct relationship to verse 9.

What then is “the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world”?

RULE 2 – THE SELF-INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Let Paul explain Paul. That is to say let the bible explain itself. Where in scripture is this hidden wisdom explained?

Romans 16:v25, 26

Colossians 1:v25-27

1Timothy 3:v16

It is clear Paul was speaking of the plan of salvation that existed from all eternity but is made manifest in his day by the preaching of Christ crucified which when believed is Christ in us the hope of glory.

Why did she apply this text to the New Earth, when exegetically Paul was speaking of the gospel? Because the wording of the text fits the New Earth. She was communicating to God’s people the wonderful things of the New Earth which is beyond imagination.

This is one important reason not to use Ellen Write as an interpreter of scripture.

For those who do, she is particularly clear this is not the correct approach.

This is best seen in the theological struggles that divided the denomination’s leading thinkers.

THE THEOLOGICAL STRUGGLES OVER THE LAW IN GALATIANS

The theological crisis in the 1850’s centered over “the law in Galatians”. According to some, she had said in a testimony that the law in Galatians is the ceremonial law. In the Minneapolis General Conference session on October 24, 1888, she declared it was in the providence of God, that, that testimony could not be found.

“Now, the words that were spoken here were that Elder Waggoner was running this meeting. Has he not presented to you the words of the Bible? Why was it that I lost the manuscript and for two years could not find it? God has a purpose in this. He wants us to go to the Bible and get the Scripture evidence. I shall find it again and present it to you. But this investigation must go forward. All the object I had was that the light should be gathered up, and let the Saviour come in.” 1888 153.4

“Our position and faith is in the Bible. And never do we want any soul to bring in the Testimonies ahead of the Bible.—Manuscript 7, 1894. – Ev 256.3

“Get Proofs From the Bible—In public labor do not make prominent, and quote that which Sister White has written, as authority to sustain your positions. To do this will not increase faith in the testimonies. Bring your evidences, clear and plain, from the Word of God. A “Thus saith the Lord” is the strongest testimony you can possibly present to the people. Let none be educated to look to Sister White, but to the mighty God, who gives instruction to Sister White.—Letter 11, 1894. – 3SM 29.3

THE CALL FOR REORGANIZATION IN 1901

At the 1901 General Conference, one of the main items was the reorganization of the church. In a morning talk before the sessions she urged delegates to make biblical principles their primary authority.

“When you make the Bible your food, your meat, and your drink, when you make its principles the elements of your character, you will know better how to receive counsel from God. I exalt the precious Word before you today. Do not repeat what I have said, saying, “Sister White said this,” and “Sister White said that.” Find out what the Lord God of Israel says, and then do what He commands.—Manuscript 43, 1901.”- 3SM 33.1

“Lay Sister White to one side. Do not quote me as long as you live until you can obey the bible.” (3SM pg. 33.1)

“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 experience. “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.” – GC 7.1

CONTROVERSY OVER THE DAILY OF DANIEL 8

Twenty years later Mrs. White took the same position on the controversy over the Daily of Dan. 8.

“I have words to speak to my brethren east and west, north and south. I request that my writings shall not be used as the leading argument to settle questions over which there is now so much controversy. I entreat of Elders H, I, J, and others of our leading brethren, that they make no reference to my writings to sustain their views of “the daily.” (1SM pg. 164.1)

It has been presented to me that this is not a subject of vital importance. I am instructed that our brethren are making a mistake in magnifying the importance of the difference in the views that are held. I cannot consent that any of my writings shall be taken as settling this matter. The true meaning of “the daily” is not to be made a test question. (1SM pg. 164.2)

I now ask that my ministering brethren shall not make use of my writings in their arguments regarding this question [“the daily”]; for I have had no instruction on the point under discussion, and I see no need for the controversy. Regarding this matter under present conditions, silence is eloquence.” (1SM pg. 164.3)

The enemy of our work is pleased when a subject of minor importance can be used to divert the minds of our brethren from the great questions that should be the burden of our message. As this is not a test question, I entreat of my brethren that they shall not allow the enemy to triumph by having it treated as such. (1SM pg. 164.4)

SUMMARY

Having examined her council on the purpose of her writings and not how to use her writings – as an infallible commenter of the meaning of scripture and having recognized that she spoke homiletically rather than exegetically, it is also vital to note that she spoke to the exegetical meaning of a text. Ellen White’s council is that the bible must be the source of establishing doctrine and setting doctrinal differences.

In heeding her council as students of the bible we are biblically grounded and rightly informed in her inspired councils as God intended.

“But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.” (GC pg. 595.1)