

PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD, Part 1: “Our Supreme Authority” (Outline)

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I have often said that the genius of Seventh-day Adventism is its recognition that the inspired text explains itself.

Sometime ago I wrote an article for my website by this title: “The Genius of Seventh-day Adventism,” in which I focus on this point:

<https://advindicate.com/articles/2016/4/3/the-genius-of-seventh-day-adventism>

And when I speak of the inspired text here, I am referring both to the Bible and to the writings of Ellen G. White, the latter often called the Spirit of Prophecy.

More than a decade ago it was my privilege to serve on the Theology of Ordination Study Committee of the General Conference. And at one of our meetings, Elder Ted Wilson said, “Let us not be afraid of conflict.”

And the reason why he said this is because we have an unerring inspired standard which is self-interpreting. And it doesn’t matter what the issue is. Whether the topic is:

1. The doctrine of inspiration itself
2. The origin of life
3. Christian sexuality standards
4. Gender authority
5. **Last Generation Theology and its attendant subjects**

It is the final topic on this list which we will be addressing in this weekend’s revival series, which I have titled:

“Prepare to Meet Thy God”

Tonight’s meeting, the first in our series of five (5), will be titled, “Our Supreme Authority.”

Now from the outset, let me urge those here in attendance, or who are watching online, to obtain copies of the outlines of these sermons when they have been delivered. With all the material that’s going to be presented, you may get the impression at times that you’re getting a drink out of a fire hydrant!

I want you to get copies of these outlines and study them for yourselves, or in groups. I want you to look up the Bible verses and the Ellen White statements. I want to encourage a Berean culture among us. We can’t allow our theology to be no better than the last preacher we listened to!

Whatever the issue may be, in the spiritual realm, the written counsel of God must serve as our supreme authority.

We all know these texts:

Isa. 8:20:

“To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

The Berean Christians were praised by the New Testament apostles for the following reason:

Acts 17:11:

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

Seventh-day Adventists accept the entire Bible as their authority in matters spiritual. Seventh-day Adventists are not Old Testament Christians, New Testament Christians, Pauline Christians or Johannine Christians. Seventh-day Adventists are Biblical Christians.

And whenever we hear a theological subject presented with a heavy focus on certain Bible passages while neglecting other Bible passages—and taking a similar approach to the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy—we can almost guarantee that we are listening to error.

The Bible is very clear as to its united witness, its theological unity, and its moral harmony. We all know the words Paul wrote to his young protégé:

II Tim. 3:15-16:

“From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

Elsewhere we read:

II Peter 1:20-21:

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.

“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

So God is the One who inspired the authors of Scripture to write as they did. And the Bible is clear that what God inspires is to be understood by comparison with itself:

I Cor. 2:12-14:

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God: that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

“Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

The Old Testament says the same thing:

Isa. 28:9-10:

“Whom shall He teach knowledge? and to whom shall He make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.

“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, and there a little.”

This is how Seventh-day Adventist theology is drawn from the pages of Scripture. This is how passages which on the surface may seem to contradict other passages, are explained and understood.

Three principles form the key to understanding the inspired writings:

1. Content
2. Context
3. Consensus

That is, the actual wording of a given passage, the immediate setting in which a passage is found, together with the larger message of the inspired text as a whole. The writings of Ellen White are clear that this is how the Bible is to be understood:

FE 187-188:

“The Bible is its own expositor. 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.

“Many think that they must consult commentaries on the Scriptures in order to understand the meaning of the word of God, and we would not take the position that commentaries should not be studied; but it will take much discernment to discover the truth of God under the mass of the words of men.”

CT 462:

“The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme—of God’s original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. He should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for the supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy to the great consummation.”

OHC 207:

“The Bible is its own interpreter. With beautiful simplicity one portion connects itself with the truth of another portion, until the whole Bible is blended in one harmonious whole. Light flashes forth from one text to illuminate some portion of the Word that has seemed more obscure.”

And we’re going to find that this is the way by which the writings of Ellen White explain themselves also. When certain Ellen White statements appear to say something out of harmony with other statements, content, context, and consensus are the key to demonstrating their harmony.

But now let’s look at one of the most controversial issues regarding inspired authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. And that is the question of Ellen White’s authority in doctrinal matters.

There are those in the contemporary church who would have us believe that Ellen White’s doctrinal authority was invented after her death by so-called “fundamentalist Adventists.” But this is one of the easiest falsehoods to disprove in Adventism today.

Here is Ellen White in her own words, from throughout the decades of her ministry, regarding her authority in doctrinal matters:

EW 78:

“God has, in that Word (the Bible), promised to give visions in the last days, not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth.”

3SM 31:

“Besides the instruction in His Word, the Lord has given special testimonies to His people, not as a new revelation, but that He may set before us the plain lessons of His Word, that errors may be corrected, that the right way may be pointed out, that every soul may be without excuse.”

3SM 32:

“The Lord has given me much light that I want the people to have; for there is instruction that the Lord has given me for His people. It is light that they should have, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. This is now to come before the people, because it has been given to correct specious errors, and to specify what is truth.”

5T 665:

“Additional truth is not brought out, but God has through the Testimonies simplified the great truths already given.”

This, by the way, is what Ellen White means when she describes her writings as a “lesser light.” We know the statement:

3SM 30:

“Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.”

And why are Ellen White’s writings the lesser light? We just read the answer:

5T 665:

“Additional truth is not brought out, but God has through the Testimonies simplified the great truths already given.”

Nothing Ellen White teaches in doctrine or moral principle is original with her. It all originates with the Bible. But Ellen White elaborates on and simplifies what the Bible originates. This is what makes her writings the lesser light.

Let’s look at other Ellen White statements on the subject of her doctrinal authority:

CM 126:

“How many have read carefully *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *The Great Controversy*, and *The Desire of Ages*? I wish all to understand that my confidence in the light that God has given stands firm, because I know that the Holy Spirit’s power magnified the truth, and made it honorable, saying, ‘This is the way; walk ye in it.’ In my books the truth is stated, barricaded by a ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ The Holy Spirit traced these truths upon my heart and mind as indelibly as the law was traced by the finger of God upon the tables of stone.”

2SG 98-99:

“My accompanying angel presented before me some of the errors of those present, and also the truth in contrast with their errors. That these discordant views, which they claimed to be according to the Bible, were only according to their opinion of the Bible, and that their errors must be yielded, and they unite upon the third angel’s message. Our meeting ended victoriously. Truth gained the victory.”

5T 655-656:

“Serious errors in doctrine and practice were cherished.... God revealed these errors to me in vision and sent me to His erring children to declare them.”

GW 302:

“At that time one error after another pressed in upon us; ministers and doctors brought in new doctrines. We would search the Scriptures with much prayer, and the Holy Spirit would bring the truth to our minds.... The power of God would come upon me, and I was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error.”

And like the Bible, Ellen White’s writings interpret themselves:

ISM 42:

“The testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the messages given, as scripture is explained by scripture.”

Now, what too many fail to consider in these discussions about the authority of Ellen White in relation to the Bible, is that in the Bible story, no distinction exists between the authority of prophets whose writings were later included in the canon of Scripture, and those whose writings were not included.

There’s no difference in the Biblical narrative between—on the one hand—the authority of Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or the apostle Paul, and on the other hand, the authority of Nathan, Elijah, Huldah, or John the Baptist.

God does not have junior prophets.

In fact, Jesus called John the Baptist—a non-canonical prophet—the greatest of the prophets:

Luke 7:28:

“For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.”

Whether a prophet’s testimonies are included in the Biblical canon, or not, they represent the Word of the living God to humanity. The only difference between canonical and non-canonical prophets is function, not authority.

When it comes to doctrinal truth:

Canonical prophets originate.

Non-canonical prophets elaborate.

Fallible Authorities

Sadly, in certain circles of contemporary Adventism, the inspired text has been supplemented, even supplanted, by fallible and misleading sources of authority:

Human opinion
Human culture
Human scholarship
Human experience

The Bible warns us against trusting human authority in matters spiritual:

Jer. 17:5:

“Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.”

Jesus gives the following warning against placing trust in human wisdom:

Matt. 11:25:

“I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”

CTr 331:

“It is the Word of the living God that is to decide all controversies. It is when people mingle their own human smartness with God’s words of truth, in giving sharp thrusts to those who are in controversy with them, that they show that they have not a sacred reverence for God’s Inspired Word. They mix the human with the divine, the common with the sacred, and they belittle God’s Word.”

SC 89:

“We should not take the testimony of any man as to what the Scriptures teach, but should study the words of God for ourselves.”

FH 297:

“When errors arise and are taught as Bible truth, those who have a connection with Christ will not trust to what the minister says, but, like the noble Bereans, they will search the Scriptures daily to see if these things are so.”

7T 71:

“One sentence of Scripture is of more value than ten thousand of man’s ideas or arguments.”

Even more dangerous, perhaps, than trusting human opinion and human scholarship in the spiritual realm is placing trust in human experience. This has become a major problem in certain circles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. Especially has this become a problem in discussions about what has come to be known as Last Generation Theology.

Many use as an argument against this theology, “I tried that for years, but it didn’t work for me.”

The problem is that Judas and the rich young ruler would have probably said the same thing about the teachings of Jesus. When people say that a certain doctrinal truth didn’t “work” for them, perhaps what they’re really saying is that the price of permitting it to work was higher than they were willing to pay.

But we have the following very strong inspired admonitions against trusting human experience as a spiritual authority:

3T 71:

“The plainest facts may be presented, the clearest truths, sustained by the word of God, may be brought before the mind, but the ear and heart are closed, and the all-convincing argument is, ‘my experience.’ Some will say, ‘The Lord has blessed me in believing and doing as I have; therefore I cannot be in error.’ ‘My experience’ is clung to, and the most elevating, sanctifying truths of the Bible are rejected for what they are pleased to style experience.”

CH 108:

“Eve was beguiled by the serpent and made to believe that God would not do as He had said. She ate, and, thinking she felt the sensation of a new and more exalted life, she bore the fruit to her husband. The serpent had said that she should not die, and she felt no ill effects from eating the fruit, nothing which could be interpreted to mean death, but, instead, a pleasurable sensation, which she imagined was as the angels felt. Her experience stood arrayed against the positive command of Jehovah, yet Adam permitted himself to be seduced by it.”

Entire books have been written in modern Adventism that are driven by this concept. Beware of them!

Conclusion

To close this message, I return to Elder Wilson’s admonition: “Let us not be afraid of conflict.” And the reason we shouldn’t be afraid is because of the following inspired promise:

2SM 108:

“Not one cloud has fallen upon the church that God has not prepared for; not one opposing force has risen to counterwork the work of God but He has foreseen. All has taken place as He has predicted through His prophets.”

Only the Bible and the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy are free of doctrinal error:

GC vii:

“The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of [God’s] will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience.”

3SM 52:

“There is one straight chain of truth, without one heretical sentence in that which I have written.”

Now friends, I would never dare to make a statement like that, and I truly doubt that any of my colleagues in ministry—and probably no one in this room—would dare to say such a thing. But an inspired prophet can. Because prophets don’t give their own opinions as counsel to believers.

When King Zedekiah called Jeremiah into the courtyard of the prison before Jerusalem fell, he asked the prophet:

Jer. 37:17:

“Is there any word from the Lord?”

Notice he didn’t ask, “What’s your opinion, Jeremiah?” “What’s your best assessment of the current situation?” He asked, “Is there any word from the Lord?”

That's why you consult a prophet. Not for the latest research. Not for the best analysis of a given situation. No. You go to a prophet for word directly from heaven.

GC 625:

“Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures, and who have received the love of the truth, will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive.”

3SM 83-84:

“Men may get up scheme after scheme, and the enemy will seek to seduce souls from the truth; but all who believe that the Lord has spoken through Sister White, and has given her a message, will be saved from the many delusions that will come in these last days.”

II Chron. 20:20:

“Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established: believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper.”