

Pastor's Corner – 11-9-2019 – Proposed Statement of Confidence

At this year's Annual Council of the General Conference there were two statements sent to the delegates for consideration with the intent to forward these to the 2020 GC session. The two statements were formal declarations of confidence in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. I've included the statement about EGW below for your consideration.

RECOMMENDED, To approve the Statement of Confidence in the Writings of Ellen G White, which reads as follows:

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENCE IN THE WRITINGS OF ELLEN G WHITE

As delegates to the 2020 General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana, we express our deep gratitude for God's prophetic guidance of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Aiming to live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4, NKJV; cf. Luke 15 10:16), we take seriously the biblical passages that teach the abiding nature of the gift of prophecy (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:10, 28; Eph 4:11-14) and promise its end-time manifestation (Joel 17 2:28-31; Rev 12:17; 19:10; 22:9). We recognize the gift of prophecy in the life and ministry of Ellen G White (1827-1915).

We believe that the writings of Ellen G White were inspired by the Holy Spirit and are Christ-centered and Bible-based. Rather than replacing the Bible, they uplift the normative character of Scripture **and correct inaccurate interpretations imposed upon it. They also help us to overcome the human tendency to accept from the Bible what we like and distort or disregard what we do not like.**

We commit ourselves to prayerfully study the writings of Ellen G White **with hearts willing to follow the counsels and instructions found therein.** Whether individually, in the family, in small groups, in the classroom, or in the church, we believe that the study of her writings brings us closer to God and His infallible Word—the Scriptures—providing us a transforming and faith-uplifting experience.

We rejoice in the Lord for what has already been accomplished for the global and local circulation of the writings of Ellen G White in both printed and electronic formats, including egwwritings.org and related apps. We encourage the continued development of both worldwide and local strategies to foster the circulation and study of her writings in as many languages as possible. The study of these writings is a powerful means to strengthen and prepare God's people to face the challenges of these last days as we approach Christ's soon return.



This statement (along with the one about the Bible) was passed with little discussion or fanfare at the GC Annual Council. More recently the North American Division held their own year end meetings where these two statements again made an appearance. At the NADYEM the statement on the Bible passed easily but there were some questions regarding the one about Ellen White's writings. I have highlighted a few of the sentences that gave some delegates pause when they read the document.

The Adventist church began as a movement that supported the protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Simply put, this means that all matters of faith, practice, and doctrine must rest firmly upon the foundation of the Bible and nothing else. Bible only, that's what *sola scriptura* means. In fact, the baptismal certificate today still contains this commitment statement, "I believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word, the only rule of faith and practice for the Christian..." If the church formally accepts the statement about Ellen White proposed at the Annual Council, I fear we are taking a large step away from our *sola scriptura* roots.

Take a look at what is implied by the highlighted sentences above. In essence it is saying that, while the Bible may be our standard, we need Ellen White to help us understand it correctly. She is there to kind of help us along and make sure we interpret scripture the right way. This statement says that we should always put on our Ellen White “glasses” when we read the Bible and interpret God’s word through those lenses. In other words, her writings become an infallible interpreter of God’s word and we should submit our own understanding of scripture to her.

The statement also asks us to willingly follow the council and instruction given by Ellen White. This makes her a second source of “faith and practice for the Christian” right up there with the Bible (and in direct opposition to the statement in the Baptismal certificate).

That’s not very protestant of us and it sounds a lot like the Catholic doctrine of Papal infallibility to me. Or maybe the Mormon view of the Book of Mormon and the work of Joseph Smith. If voted, we can no longer truly say we are *sola scriptura* or even *prima scriptura*. Instead we become *scriptura et testimonium* (scripture and testimonies).

Personally, I think this statement has things backwards. I think that when we read Ellen White’s writings we should put on our Bible glasses and view her words through the lens of scripture. We allow the Bible to interpret itself and her writings, instead using her writings to interpret the Bible.

There’s a passage from Hebrews that I think is appropriate to consider. It says, “The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

Jesus also teaches that he will send the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and to teach us all things. What this says to me is that we don’t need anybody to interpret scripture for us. We don’t need a prophet, scholar, conference leader, or pastor to give us the right meaning of scripture (that’s what the church taught in the middle ages). If you diligently study the Bible with a prayerful heart, God himself will be your teacher. As protestants, we don’t submit our will or conscience to the beliefs of other human beings.

While I believe God used Ellen White to do some amazing things and that our church was blessed by her ministry, I personally can’t accept the above statement as written. I feel it gives her far too much authority and places her alongside, if not above, the Bible. Back in the early days of our church it was not required that members (or even pastors) have confidence in the visions of Ellen White. Her ministry was never a test of fellowship. It’s unfortunate that we seem to be forgetting our history and turning our backs on the foundational principals of the protestant reformation. Let’s get back to *sola scriptura*.

Happy Sabbath
Pastor Tyler