

Blinded By The “Lesser Light”

By John Clark

A woman in a white floral dress stands on a beach, her back to the camera. She has her hands on her head, looking out at the ocean under a bright, hazy sky. The scene is backlit by the sun, creating a silhouette effect and a strong lens flare.

It was not our intended to stay up all night hiking, but when we reached the top of the sandstone crag we had been scaling, we realized that the gathering darkness prevented us from retracing our route back down the rocky precipice. Miles from town and 750 ft above our vehicles parked on the road below we knew we were in trouble, and nobody had brought a light, not even a candle. To the west we could see the glow of the distant city on the darkened cloudy sky. “Let’s head toward town”, I said, “at least it has hills leading down to the roads and not sheer rock walls.” So, with trembling steps we began to grope our way over unknown territory in the pitch darkness toward the light. Thankfully, by the grace of God, we escaped falling into any of the many intervening chasms for which that part of the wilderness is renowned. The closer we got to our destination the greater the light shown. At last we reached the top of the hill that overlooked civilization. Home sweet home, our feet were finally safe again. Light is most precious when the darkness is the most ominous. Subsequently, my flashlight packing has tended toward the excessive. Do you blame me?

God of Light

In this dark age, I welcome the light of the glory of God. It is the passion of my life to become acquainted with His light and walk in its fulness (John 12:35). We know that God is light, and that in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). What awesome light! There is no greater light than that emanating from God. All other lights pale by comparison.

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Light of the World

Jesus came to make manifest that light more fully to our darkened human senses. He came as the brightness of the Father's glory (Hebrews 1:1-3). Jesus came to shine, "in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). He said, "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12). "No other light has shone, or ever will shine, upon the intellect of sinful, fallen man, save that which was, and is, communicated through Him who is the light of the world." (Review and Herald, April 8, 1873).

A Light unto My Path

In the Scriptures God has shared His light with us. God's word is a light and a lamp (Psalms 119:105). If anyone speaks contrary to that word, "there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20). In this dark world I rejoice, with all my heart, in this precious life-giving light. It is a much-appreciated illumination that "shineth in a dark place". (2 Peter 1:19).

Greatest of the Prophets

To the "Light of the World" (Jesus Christ) John the Baptist was sent as a witness. (John 1:8). And while John humbly objected to any reference to himself as light, Jesus clearly recognized his message as a "shining light" (John 5:35). To Jesus, "John was the lesser light, which was to be followed by a greater light." (Review and Herald, April 8, 1873).

Jesus declared that, "Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." (Luke 7:28). By comparison, no other prophet, canonical or otherwise, shone as brightly as did John; not even Moses, Elijah, or Daniel.

"The prophet John was the connecting link between the two dispensations. As God's representative he stood forth to show the relation of the law and the prophets to the Christian dispensation. He was the lesser light, which was to be followed by a greater. The mind of John was illuminated by the Holy Spirit, that he might shed light upon his people; but no other light ever has shone or ever will shine so clearly upon fallen man as that which emanated from the teaching and example of Jesus." (Desire of Ages Pg. 220).

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Prophetic Light

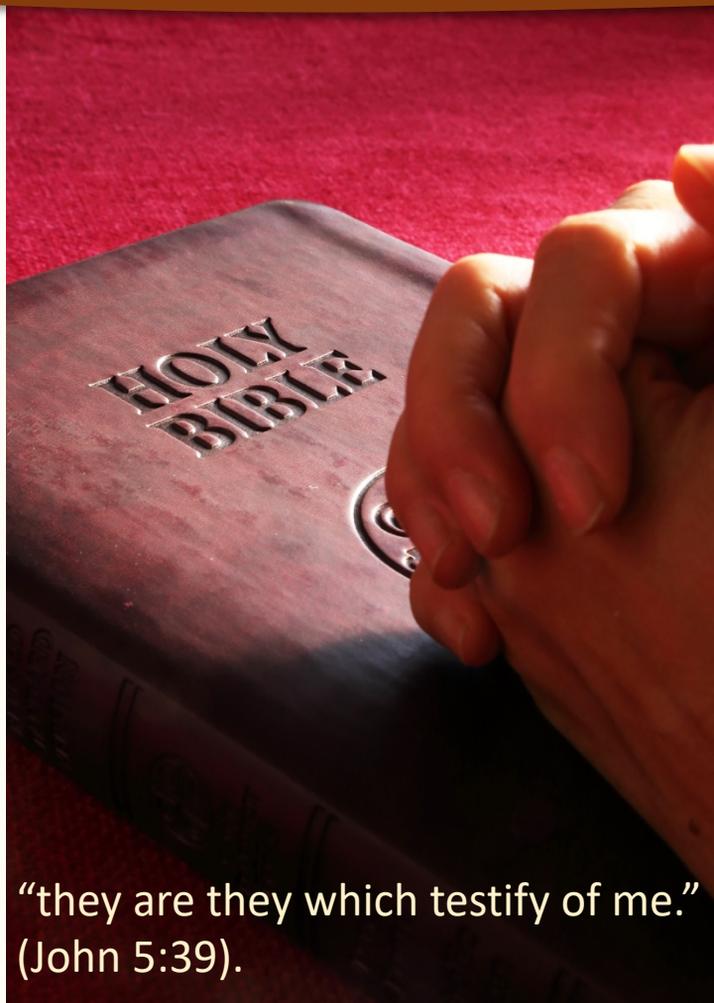
If the greatest of the prophets is referred to as a lesser light, what of the Old Testament? The Old Testament had prophesied of Christ's life on earth and the light He was to bring to those in darkness. (Isaiah 9:2). Jesus said of the Old Testament scriptures, "they are they which testify of me." (John 5:39). The Old Testament was a witness of the coming Messiah:

"With the advent of Christ, the veil of uncertainty was to be lifted, and a flood of light shed upon the darkened understanding of his people.... It was the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ, who was the foundation of the sacrificial system, that shone in the face of Moses.... When the reality, the full blaze of midday light, should come, the dim glory which was but an earnest of the latter, should be done away, swallowed up in the greater glory.... With the first advent of Christ there was ushered in an era of greater light and glory; but it would indeed be sinful ingratitude to despise and ridicule the lesser light because a fuller and more glorious light had dawned." (Signs of the Times, August 25, 1887).

Thus, the Old Testament was a lesser light testifying to the greater "Light of the World".

Eternal Spirit of Light

It is the Holy Spirit that inspired the Scriptures (2 Peter 1:21). The Scriptures reveal the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-14). But the Scriptures do not therefore supersede the Holy Spirit nor do they put limits on the Spirit in any future work. In other words, the Spirit did not burn any bridges by what it said in the



"they are they which testify of me."
(John 5:39).

Bible; it can still inspire prophets today, and does (1 Corinthians 1:6,7).

"The Holy Ghost is the author of the Scriptures and of the Spirit of Prophecy."
(Selected Messages Book 3. Pg. 30).

Testimony of Jesus

A recent church publication stated, "In Ellen G. White's own view, her writings, when compared with Scripture, were a 'lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light', the Bible (Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, January 20, 1903).", ("Sola Scriptura and Ellen G. White", Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, April 30, 2020).

I am wondering if this “lesser light” passage from the Review and Herald of 1903 is somehow misunderstood? Is the Spirit of Prophecy, as manifest in the writings of Ellen G White somehow inferior to the Biblical canon? Should the definition of our faith and practice be taken from both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy?

Famed “Lesser Light” Passage

Now let’s consider the famous “lesser light” quote recorded by Ellen G. White. Are you aware that this is the only place where this is recorded--the single witness? One would think, by the many times that it has been quoted, that it had more than one witness or reference. Let’s look at this quote in its context. After describing the need for greater circulation of her books, "Christ’s Object Lessons", "Patriarchs and Prophets," "Great Controversy," and "Desire of Ages," she testifies, “Sister White is not the originator of these books. They contain the instruction that during her life-work God has been giving her. They contain the precious, comforting light that God has graciously given his servant to be given to the world. From their pages this light is to shine into the hearts of men and women, leading them to the Saviour.” Now the question is this: to what greater light, did this passage just say, the Spirit of Prophecy is to lead men? To the “Light of the World”! To “the Saviour!” In the next paragraph we have the much-quoted statement, “The Lord has sent his people much instruction, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light.” (Review and Herald, January 20, 1903). Is the greater light, here referred to, the Bible, or the Saviour? From the previous paragraph’s context, it would have to be “the Saviour.” The description of the Spirit of Prophecy as the

“lesser light” is not something that it is to the Bible, but something that it shares with the Bible, as a co-revelation of the knowledge of Christ, who is the true greater light.

The description of the Spirit of Prophecy as the “lesser light” is not something that it is to the Bible, but something that it shares with the Bible, as a co-revelation of Jesus Christ, who is the true greater light.

Those who are blinded by the misapplication of the “lesser light” passage, will be without excuse in the day of final reckoning.

“What reserve power has the Lord with which to reach those who have cast aside His warnings and reproofs, and have accredited the testimonies of the Spirit of God to no higher source than human wisdom? In the Judgment, what can you who have done this, offer to God as an excuse for turning from the evidences He has given you that God was in the work?” (Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers. Pg. 466).

Those authors, teachers, and professors who have diminished the Spirit of Prophecy through this subtle error, “and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven:” (Matthew 5:19). Indeed, and they who have led the sheep astray, and thereby, “shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6).

Public Image

What about the passages where Ellen White warns us not to quote her before unbelievers? Doesn't this prove her to be inferior to scripture?

“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.” (Selected Messages Book 3 Pg. 29).

This counsel is given in the same light as when Jesus said, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” (Matthew 7:6). Is this counsel given because the pearls are not genuine? Just because we are cautioned not to parade Ellen G. White before the unbelieving world, does that mean her writings are not of authority to define the remnant's faith and practice? Jesus also said, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” (John 16:12). Was that because He had nothing inspired to say? No, you cannot give meat to babes. (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Paul says, “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-5). Different writings have different roles. The Bible is for public proof of biblical doctrines and the Spirit of Prophecy is

it this way, “The Bible is there to make you a Christian; the Spirit of Prophecy is there to make us Seventh-day Adventists.”



Faith and Practice

In the spirit of the sentiment that Ellen G. White's writings are a lesser light compared to Scripture, the church has gone on to claim that, “the gift exercised by Ellen G. White ‘can enrich but not define our faith and practice.’” (<https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2005-07-02/world-church-spirit-of-prophecy-resolution-voted-points-church-to-bible/>). Is the Spirit of Prophecy the light for our feet in the times of the end, or only of devotional value? Have men, by this declaration, put out the “lesser light?” Is it not to guide our faith and practice—our religion and our obedience to the very end? Let's ask Ellen White that question:

“Do those who claim to believe the Testimonies read and practice their teachings? All the light given in the living oracles and in the Testimonies, which all may read and apply, will condemn them in the day of God if they do not heed the instruction given.” (White, EG. Letter 74, 1896).

Sola Scriptura

“But,” it is argued, “all we ever needed was the scriptures.” True:

“You are not familiar with the Scriptures. If you had made God’s word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection, you would not have needed the Testimonies. It is because you have neglected to acquaint yourselves with God’s inspired Book that 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.” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2. Pg. 605.1).

But it is also true that there was a time when the Bible, as we have it today, was not really needed either.

“If Adam had not transgressed the law of God, the ceremonial law would never have been instituted.” (Selected Messages Book 1. Pg. 230).

“If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God’s law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses.” (Patriarchs and Prophets. Pg. 364).

A man who has had a heart transplant could argue that if he had maintained a healthy lifestyle, a donor heart would never have been necessary. But after the operation, it is too late to have it removed. Israel never needed a king, but once installed, the monarchy was not dispensable. What we lost in our heritage of Christian knowledge by neglect of the scriptures may not be recoverable in this day and age by limiting our study exclusively to the scriptures. God has sent another light to lead us home to Him, the Greater Light.



Light in a Sure Place

We as a people have never faced greater challenges and temptations as we do now. This is why we have been given extra light. Satan knows that once we let go of the Spirit of Prophecy anchor, he can easily set us adrift.

“The enemy has made his masterly efforts to unsettle the faith of our own people in the Testimonies, and when these errors come in they claim to prove all the positions by the Bible, but they misinterpret the Scriptures. They make bold assertions, as did Elder Canright, and misapply the prophecies and the Scriptures to prove falsehood.

“And, after men have done their work in weakening the confidence of our churches in the Testimonies, they have torn away the barrier, that unbelief in the truth shall become widespread, and there is no voice to be lifted up to stay the force of error.”

“This is just as Satan designed it should be, and those who have been preparing the way for the people to pay no heed to the warnings and reproofs of the testimonies of the Spirit of God will see that a tide of errors of all kinds will spring into life. They will claim Scripture as their evidence, and deceptions of Satan in every form will prevail.” (Manuscript Releases, vol. 16, Pg. 80).

Thus, failure to consult the Spirit of Prophecy in matters of faith and practice leads to skepticism and apostasy from the truth. We, “upon whom the ends of the world are come.” (1 Corinthians 10:11) need both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy (Revelation 12:17) to guide our faith and practice.

Just as you cannot break one of God’s commandments without breaking them all, you cannot despise one of God’s gifts of light without despising them all:

“It is Satan’s plan to weaken the faith of God’s people in the Testimonies. Next follows skepticism in regard to the vital points of our faith, the pillars of our position, then doubt as to the Holy Scriptures, and then the downward march to perdition. When the Testimonies, which were once believed, are doubted and given up, Satan knows the deceived ones will not stop at this; and he redoubles his efforts till he launches them into open rebellion, which



The concept of the lesser light comes from Genesis where it is stated, “And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.” Genesis 1:16. Jesus said, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.” John 9:4. Could it be that the “lesser light” of the testimonies are especially for the dark days ahead in the time of trouble while the Sun of Righteousness is out of sight?

becomes incurable and ends in destruction.” (Testimonies for the Church, Vol 4, Pg. 211).

“One thing is certain: Those Seventh-day Adventists who take their stand under Satan’s banner will first give up their faith in the warnings and reproofs contained in the Testimonies of God’s Spirit.” (Selected Messages Vol 3. Pg. 84).

Is your faith in the Testimonies of the Spirit of God solid? Have they been as the voice of God to your soul? Are you ready for the time of trouble?

“The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. ‘Where there is no vision, the people perish’ (Proverbs 29:18). Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God’s remnant people in the true testimony.” (Manuscript Releases, vol. 10, Pg. 311).

A Prophet Without Honor

Jesus said: "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." (Mark 6:4). We have the prophetic gift in our church. Do we value it as much as we do Moses, Elijah, and Jeremiah?

"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.' (Revelation 12:17). This prophecy points out clearly that the remnant church will acknowledge God in His law and will have the prophetic gift. Obedience to the law of God, and the spirit of prophecy has always distinguished the true people of God, and the test is usually given on present manifestations."

"In Jeremiah's day the people had no question about the message of Moses, Elijah, or Elisha, but they did question and put aside the message sent of God to Jeremiah until its force and power was wasted and there was no remedy but for God to carry them away into captivity."

"Likewise in the days of Christ the people had learned that Jeremiah's message was true, and they persuaded themselves to believe that if they had lived in the days of their fathers they would have accepted his message, but at the same time they were rejecting Christ's message, of whom all the prophets had written." (Loma Linda Messages. Pg. 33).

We are currently great believers in the Bible, but are we still questioning present truth? Have we relegated it to a lesser place?

Light Despised

Why has it been so attractive to relegate the Testimonies to a lesser role? Is it because we love the light? No. John, captures the sentiment behind this rejection of light well in John 3:19-21, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." Do we avoid reading it because we don't want to hear it?

"In Jeremiah's day the people had no question about the message of Moses, Elijah, or Elisha, but they did question and put aside the message sent of God to Jeremiah..."

We should be proud of this light, enthusiastically sharing it with all who are not "swine". Failure to believe and share could leave us in deeper darkness. "No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness." (Luke 11:33-35). "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" (Isaiah 5:20-21).

Types and Shadows

The experience of Josiah the king well illustrates the shining light of modern prophecy. Hilkiah the high priest, in cleaning out the temple, discovered the book of the law in the house of the Lord. When it was read before King Josiah he realized that Israel was in deep apostasy, but he had no idea what to do about it. So he told the priests to, "Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me." (2 Kings 22:13). Happily, they knew just what to do to make their enquiry of the Lord. They, "went unto Huldah the prophetess," (2 Kings 22:14) and asked for the word of the Lord from her, and God honored their humility and their faith. He gave the answer they needed through her. In this biblical story they have a prophet (Hulda), who never wrote a word of the Bible, telling the people how to relate to the Bible. This is similar to how we started as a church. This is the role Ellen White often took. This is how we arrived at many of our most important pillars of faith and doctrines.

"In the early days of the message, when our numbers were few, we studied diligently to understand the meaning of many scriptures. At times it seemed as if no explanation could be given. My mind seemed to be locked to an understanding of the Word; but when our brethren who had assembled for study, came to a point where they could go no farther, and had recourse to earnest prayer, the Spirit of God would rest upon me, and I would be taken off in vision, and be instructed in regard to the relation of scripture to scripture. These experiences were repeated over and over and over again. Thus many truths of the third angel's message were established, point by point." (Review and Herald June 14, 1906).

Without the light of the Spirit of Prophecy we would not be the Church we are today. Don't let

anyone mislead you to believe that the Spirit of Prophecy had little to do with the foundations of our church or that it should not have anything to do with your faith or how you practice it today.

"There was never a time when God instructed His people more earnestly than He instructs them now concerning His will and the course that He would have them pursue."

Present Truth

The signs of the times tell us that we are on the dark brink of the great "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." (Daniel 12:1). The Spirit of Prophecy is the light, "given to the church in these last days" (The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials Pg. 808) to guide us when every wind of doctrine is striving to blow us off course. Are we to believe that we have been given an inferior guide--a lesser light--for the darkest crisis this world has ever known? Is present truth lesser light? Would that be like our God to do that to His remnant church?

"In ancient times God spoke to men by the mouth of prophets and apostles. In these days He speaks to them by the testimonies of His Spirit. There was never a time when God instructed His people more earnestly than He instructs them now concerning His will and the course that He would have them pursue." (Testimonies for the Church Volume Four Pg. 147).

The light that we have for these last days is to shine, "more and more unto the perfect day." (Proverbs 4:18). Let us walk in the light, and its illumination to our path will increase as we approach the glorious light of God and eternity.



Have we been blinded by the “lesser light” theory? As the most prominent source of present truth for the end times, it is not in our best interest to relegate the Spirit of Prophecy to a less influential place. Described as the “Lesser Light,” it is not lesser to the Bible, but rather, it, like the Scriptures, are lesser lights to bring us to Jesus Christ. If we are to truly be as the wise man that built his house upon the rock, then the foundation of our faith and practice in these last days must include the Testimony of Jesus Christ. As with our other unique pillars of truth, we need wisdom in discerning to whom, and at what time, and under what circumstances we share the writings of Ellen G White, lest we cast them as pearls before proverbial swine. Let us all reaffirm our faith in the gift that God has given the remnant by reading and practicing it, in the power of the Spirit who inspired it. How prominent a place are you willing to give the end-time “Testimony of Jesus” in your life?