

Divisive Topics

During the 1888 message, several contentions had been brewing. Spiritual Israel was upon the border of Canaan, and Satan sought to divide them. These same topics are recirculating now.

The Topics

I will briefly list the divisive topics that were creating division while Christ was at the door. The Daily of Daniel 8, 11, and 12, the identity of the king of the North, the identity of the ten horns, and the nature (specified character, not personhood) of the Holy Spirit. Ironically, people are still arguing about these.

Regarding the Daily Ellen White wrote:

“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.”—*1 Selected Messages*, 164.

Regarding the king of the North, the Biography of Ellen White records:

“One of the testimonies to individuals, delivered most likely only in oral form, was addressed to James White—a reproof for his course of action just before the combined camp meeting and General Conference session. He and Uriah Smith held conflicting views on the prophecy of the ‘king of the North’ pictured in Daniel 11, and the power presented in verse 45 that would come to his end with none to help him. White, in his Sabbath morning address September 28 in the newly pitched camp-meeting tent, countered Smith’s interpretations. He felt that Smith’s approach, indicating that the world was on the verge of Armageddon, would threaten the strong financial support needed for the rapidly expanding work of the church.”

Ellen White’s message to her husband was a reproof for taking a course that would lead the people to observe differences of opinion among leaders and to lower their confidence in them. For the church leaders to stand in a divided position before the people was hazardous. James White accepted the reproof, but it was one of the most difficult experiences he was called

to cope with, for he felt he was doing the right thing. At no time did Ellen White reveal which man was right in the position he held. That was not the issue. The crux of the matter was the importance of leaders presenting a united front before the people.”—*3 Biography, The Lonely Years*, 96-97.

If this had been an issue of salvation, Ellen White would have clarified. It is a matter of truth, but it is not to be brought to the front or to be fought about.

Regarding the Holy Spirit, we read:

It is not essential for us to be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is. Christ tells us that the Spirit is the Comforter, ‘the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father.’ It is plainly declared regarding the Holy Spirit that, in His work of guiding men into all truth, ‘He shall not speak of Himself.’ John 15:26; 16:13 The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them. Men having fanciful views may bring together passages of Scripture and put a human construction on them, but the acceptance of these views will not strengthen the church. Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden.”—*Acts of the Apostles*, 52.

The identity of the Ten horns was under debate during the 1888 session:

“There was the question of the law in Galatians, which had been introduced at the session in 1886, and also the identity of the ten horns, or kingdoms, of the beast of Daniel 7. Views on these points, held by Signs of the Times editors E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, were in conflict with the traditional views held quite generally, and particularly by Butler and Smith. White also had in mind the Sunday movement, duties of church officers, and the education of home and foreign laborers.”—*3 Biography, The Lonely Years*, 390.

It would appear that the divinity of Christ was also under consideration, but this is an essential Truth:

“The subjects proposed to be considered in the hours for Biblical and historical study are, so far, a historical view of the ten kingdoms, the divinity of Christ, the healing of the deadly wound, justification by faith, how far we should

go in trying to use the wisdom of the serpent, and predestination. Other subjects will doubtless be introduced.”—*The Review and Herald*, October 16, 1888.

I was unable to find much about the identity of the ten horns in Ellen White’s writings. It must not have been important.

I want to draw your attention to this quote from one of Ellen White’s early visions:

“Then I saw Laodiceans. They will make a mighty effort. Will they get the victory? One who has the truth will chase a thousand, and two will put ten thousand to flight. They are coming to conclusions that bring them into close quarters, and they can not tell where they be themselves, for they are lost in the foggy, terrible fear that takes hold of them. Anguish of spirit will seize them. Dare they admit that the door is shut? The sin against the Holy Ghost was to ascribe to Satan what belongs to God or what the Holy Ghost has done. They said the shut door was of the devil and now admit it is against their own lives. They shall die the death. Look ye at the Pattern. Follow Him, for He is meek and lowly in heart. Shut your eyes to everything but the present, saving truth.”—5 *Manuscript Releases*, 204.

There is Truth, and there is present saving Truth. Present saving Truth is what we need. These topics are not drawing us together as a people but separating us.

An Important Saving Truth

We are to have the faith of Jesus, and faith in Jesus. We need to understand that God is a person, not a force, and that Jesus is God.

“Another dangerous error is the doctrine that denies the deity of Christ, claiming that He had no existence before His advent to this world. This theory is received with favor by a large class who profess to believe the Bible; yet it directly contradicts the plainest statements of our Saviour concerning His relationship with the Father, His divine character, and His pre-existence. It cannot be entertained without the most unwarranted wresting of the Scriptures. It not only lowers man’s conceptions of the work of redemption, but undermines faith in the Bible as a revelation from God. While this renders it the more dangerous, it makes it also harder to meet. If men reject the testimony of the inspired Scriptures concerning the deity of Christ, it is in vain to argue the point with them; for no argument, however conclusive, could convince them. ‘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.’ 1 Corinthians 2:14. None who hold this error can have a true conception of the character or the mission of

Christ, or of the great plan of God for man’s redemption.”—*Great Controversy*, 524.

This quote highlights the importance of believing in the mystery of Godliness:

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”—1 *Timothy* 3:16.

Some mysteries may never be revealed throughout eternity. We should avoid entering into controversy or seeking mysteries God has not seen fit to reveal.

“Men have endeavored to be wiser than their Creator; human philosophy has attempted to search out and explain mysteries which will never be revealed through the eternal ages. If men would but search and understand what God had made known of Himself and His purposes, they would obtain such a view of the glory, majesty, and power of Jehovah that they would realize their own littleness and would be content with that which has been revealed for themselves and their children.”

It is a masterpiece of Satan’s deceptions to keep the minds of men searching and conjecturing in regard to that which God has not made known and which He does not intend that we shall understand. It was thus that Lucifer lost his place in heaven. He became dissatisfied because all the secrets of God’s purposes were not confided to him, and he entirely disregarded that which was revealed concerning his own work in the lofty position assigned him. By arousing the same discontent in the angels under his command, he caused their fall. Now he seeks to imbue the minds of men with the same spirit and to lead them also to disregard the direct commands of God.”—*Great Controversy*, 523.

The sad truth about many of these contentious topics is that those advocating them disregard anything that does not align with their theories.

A Destructive Virtue

Here is a divisive measure that is viewed as a virtue today. We have explicit instructions to not attack people or make it our duty to reveal the “Mystery of Iniquity.”

“Decided proclamations are to be made. But in regard to this line of work, I am instructed to say to our people: Be guarded. In bearing the message, make no personal thrusts at other churches, not even the Roman Catholic Church. Angels of God see in the different denominations many who can be reached only by the greatest caution. Therefore let us be careful of our words. Let not our ministers follow their own impulses in denouncing and exposing the

“mysteries of iniquity.” Upon these themes silence is eloquence. Many are deceived. Speak the truth in tones and words of love. Let Christ Jesus be exalted. Keep to the affirmative of truth. Never leave the straight path God has marked out, for the purpose of giving someone a thrust. That thrust may do much harm and no good. It may quench conviction in many minds. Let the Word of God, which is the truth, tell the story of the inconsistency of those in error.”

People cannot be expected to see at once the advantage of the truth over the error they have cherished. The best way to expose the fallacy of error is to present the evidences of truth. This is the greatest rebuke that can be given to error. Dispel the cloud of darkness resting on minds by reflecting the bright light of the Sun of Righteousness.”—*Evangelism*, 576.

Can you imagine how wonderful our church would be if everyone called out error by sharing the Truth from the Bible? Many people spend all their time searching out sins, calling people out by name and sharing the details with the Godless scoffers. This is not the way we are to rebuke sins. Those who spend time beholding sin become numb to it. If close inquiry into their lives would be made, no doubt they would be guilty of the same sins to a greater or less degree. Now is the time to put on the robes of Christ’s righteousness. We do not do this by contrasting our robes with others that are more dirty. Said the Arch Deceiver:

“We must cause distraction and division. We must destroy their anxiety for their own souls, and lead them to criticise, to judge, and to accuse and condemn one another, and to cherish selfishness and enmity. For these sins, God banished us from his presence; and all who follow our example will meet a similar fate.”—*4 Spirit of Prophecy*, 340.

Egotism

In these last days, self is being mixed with the Truth of God more and more. Many shepherds are actually wolves in disguise. We are given a clue on how to spot those who are motivated by self:

“Our ministers must cease to dwell upon their peculiar ideas with the feeling, ‘You must see this point as I do, or you cannot be saved.’ Away with this egotism. The great work to be done in every case is to win souls to Christ. Men must see Jesus on the cross, they must look and live. It is not your ideas they must feed upon, but it is the flesh and blood of the Son of God. He says, ‘My flesh is meat indeed.’ ‘The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.’ John 6:55, 63.”—*1 Selected Messages* 178.

There is a lot of egotism nowadays. Many people act as if salvation depended on whether others

accepted their ideas as Truth. Many Christians are living as shadows of others. People who present unique views that are not backed by a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ and claim it is a matter of salvation, should be marked and avoided. God has revealed all saving Truth in the Bible very plainly. Our unique truths are not based on subtle hints from several passages of Scripture. Scripture is to be compared with Scripture, but it must be divided rightly. We have our present Truth, the Commandments of God, and faith in Jesus (including His divinity). This is the only way to escape the coming wrath of God on those who worship the beast and his image. Being right about other mysteries, including what or where God is, will be irrelevant if we don’t obey Him.

Obedience is more important than holding the correct view. How much Truth we have does not affect our weight in God’s scale of judgment; it just makes our condemnation heavier if we aren’t obeying it. What weighs with God is how much love we work by. Do we love God enough to obey Him? Do we love our enemies the way Christ loves His enemies?

“God regards more with how much love one worketh than the amount he doeth. Love is of God. The unconverted heart cannot originate nor produce this plant of heavenly growth, which lives and flourishes only where Christ reigns.”—*2 Testimonies*, 135.

Foolish Questions

Paul, writing to Timothy, says:

“But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.”—*2 Timothy* 2:23.

The topics discussed at the beginning of this newsletter all qualify as foolish and unlearned questions, they are neither edifying or profitable. This is because they gender strifes, or literally birth strife. This does not mean that we cannot or should not study them. Instead, we should avoid questions about them and discuss more important topics such as righteousness, temperance, and the coming judgment. I don’t hear much on these topics nowadays.

Jesus prayed for us to be united:

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”—*John* 17:21.

Christ wants us to be united with one another and with God. This is a unity in purpose and a unity in motive. We are to present the words of Jesus for others to feast on and not our own ideas. Christ came to save His people from their

4 sins; this is the purpose we are to be united in: redemption. If we are united in this purpose and motivated by love, our approach will be correct: we will love and cherish Truth. We have our marching orders, we have our topics. Hearing people accuse each other of error is not edifying. It will not tend to make us righteous; hearing the sins of others and listening to their mistakes will not strengthen our faith. I fully recognize that publicly rebuking straying elders is part of the divine plan. However, it is of the utmost importance that we do not rebuke them based on accusations.

“Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.”—1 Timothy 5:19-21.

An Apology

I apologize to my readers if I have sown strife, especially regarding the topic “The King of the North.” I have written on this topic, and now I recognize that whether it was true or not is irrelevant because it did not serve the purpose of edifying. I am a human too, and I make mistakes. If I have offended anyone, I sincerely apologize. I notice that the burden of Ellen White’s writings focuses on the statements in Revelation rather than those in Daniel. It appears that the interpretation of Revelation remained uncontested. I will take note of this. There is more than one approach to sharing Truth. I will choose the less divisive one.

Conclusion

I exhort you not to strive about things that tend to divide people. These are side issues. The commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus should be the theme of our discussions. Prophecy is essential, but it cannot grant repentance. The Truth is a wonderful thing; it is a blessing. I will write about it, but the Truth should not eclipse love. I will avoid these topics in the future unless God gives me clear instructions otherwise. Saving Truths such as the divinity of Christ, His priesthood, Justification, victory over Sin through temperance, etc, I will continue to write about.

“The judgment is right upon us. We cannot

afford to spend our time quarreling over little things. There is a great work before us. My brethren, we must wake up to the issues which face us, and that before this meeting closes. Heart must be cemented to heart. Pray for this; labor for it. Do not, I beg of you, allow differences to come in. May God help you to gather up the divine rays of light, and flash them across the pathway of others. May He help you to love one another as Christ has loved you. ‘By this,’ He says, ‘shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.’ John 13:35. There is power with Christ to heal; there is power with Him to save to the uttermost all who come to Him. But we must be willing to be saved. We must put aside all self-sufficiency. We must be in spirit as little children, or we shall never see the kingdom of heaven. Our measurement of ourselves is too large. We are but little children. We have not attained to the full stature of men and women in Christ. There is much matured intelligence for us yet to gain. We must overcome the pride that leads us to prefer to work by ourselves, rather than with a fellow laborer, lest he rob us of glory. God wants us to press close together, that we may help one another. In Australia a minister was asked by a brother minister to leave the pulpit. ‘I want the people to see no one but me,’ he said. And they did indeed see no one but him.”—Manuscript 14, 1903 par. 43.

We should not be afraid to unite with those who believe in the Commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus, even if we don’t see eye to eye on every topic. I fully believe that if we can preserve the peace and grace of Jesus Christ in our hearts in trials and in difficulties, we shall go through them without discord, distraction, or division. We are known as Christ’s disciples not because we have the truth, but because we love one another. It’s not a sin to have different views on truth that cannot be obeyed.

For a finished work



Jonathan Taylor

Wisdom is justified of all her children. -Luke 7:35

More Food for the Little Flock —