

What Are Ellen G. White's Writings All About? Major Themes in Ellen G. White's Writings

The following seven themes are not the only ones that could have been chosen, but they are certainly among her most basic, and are prominent throughout her works.

The Love of God

The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan

Jesus Christ, His Sacrifice, His Heavenly Intercession, and Salvation Through Him

The Believer's Response--Love of God & Love of Neighbor

The Centrality of God's Word

The Third Angel's Message and Seventh-day Adventist Mission

The Second Advent

The Love of God

Perhaps the central and most comprehensive theme in the writings of Ellen White is that of the love of God. The phrase "God is love" provides the beginning and ending words in her five-volume treatment of the Conflict of the Ages, with more than 3,500 pages in between. It is the theme that undergirds and provides the context for all other themes in her writings. "Such love is without a parallel," she wrote in the first chapter of her classic book *Steps to Christ*. "The matchless love of God for a world that did not love Him! The thought has a subduing power upon the soul and brings the mind into captivity to the will of God. The more we study the divine character in the light of the cross, the more we see mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness blended with equity and justice, and the more clearly we discern innumerable evidences of a love that is infinite and a tender pity surpassing a mother's yearning sympathy for her wayward child" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 15).

The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan

Another integrating theme in Ellen White's writings is that of the great controversy, or struggle, between Christ and Satan. Ellen White emphasizes repeatedly that the focal point of the great controversy is Satan's aim to misrepresent the loving character of God--to portray God's law of love as an arbitrary law of selfishness. God's demonstration of His love in the ongoing conflict with Satan forms the focus of her five-volume Conflict of the Ages Series. The foremost demonstration of God's love was the sending of His Son Jesus Christ, who came not only to die for the human race, but to portray God's character of love in the face of Satan's accusations.

Jesus Christ, His Sacrifice, His Heavenly Intercession, and Salvation Through Him

The life of Jesus, His death on the cross, His ministry in applying the merits of His death in the heavenly sanctuary, and the acceptance of Christ's work by the believer through faith, stands as a great thematic cluster at the center of Ellen White's understanding of Christianity. For Ellen White, Jesus was not merely a good friend in time of need; He was a Saviour who died on the cross for each individual. Faith in Christ's salvation (or righteousness by faith) is a teaching that permeates Ellen White's writings. She uplifted a "faith in the ability of Christ to save us amply and fully and entirely" (*The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 217). "The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary. I present before you the great, grand monument of mercy and regeneration, salvation and redemption--the Son of God uplifted on the cross" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 315.)

The Believer's Response--Love of God & Love of Neighbor

Ellen White saw Christianity as affecting every part of a person's daily life. The core of practical Christianity is exhibiting Jesus' character (self-sacrificing love) rather than living by the principles of Satan's kingdom (self-seeking). It means not only the dropping of harmful habits and destructive ways of living, but incorporating the positive characteristics of Christ's character in service to God and to one another. "No one can love God and not love His children," she wrote. "Christ abiding in the soul exerts a transforming power, and the outward aspect bears witness to the peace and joy that reign within" (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 337).

The Centrality of God's Word

Parallel to Ellen White's emphasis of Christ, the living Word of God, was her concern with God's Written Word--the Scriptures. In her first book (1851) she wrote: "I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice" (*Early Writings*, p. 78). Ellen White exalted the Bible throughout her ministry as the revealed will of God, providing knowledge leading to a saving relationship with Jesus. "In His Word," she declared, "God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. 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" (*The Great Controversy*, p. vii). Ellen White saw her function as pointing people to the Bible, "a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light" (*Colporteur Ministry*, p. 125). She believed personal Bible study was of the utmost importance for every Christian, and especially so in the closing days of earth's history.

The Third Angel's Message and Seventh-day Adventist Mission

Ellen White saw Revelation 14:6-12, with its description of the messages of the three angels, as standing at the very heart of Seventh-day Adventist identity. The third angel's message (along with the first two) was not only to be global but to draw out and test human beings--creating "a people distinct and separate from the

world, who refuse to worship the beast or his image, who bear God's sign, keeping holy His Sabbath--the seventh day" (*Evangelism*, p. 233). For Ellen White, the third angel's message combines law and gospel--the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12). Not only were Ellen White's extensive writings on the law, Sabbath, righteousness by faith, the great controversy, and other topics directly related to the third angel's message, but so were her voluminous counsels on education, health, publishing, and the gospel ministry.

The Second Advent

The reality of the nearness of the second advent of Christ dominated Ellen White's life and shaped her writing career. Christ's return is seen as the climax of salvation, signaling the beginning of the end of the great controversy between good and evil, a supreme expression of God's love, the point of the three angels' messages, an incentive for living the Christian life, and demanding an urgency in preaching the gospel message to all the world in as short a time as possible.

[Condensed and adapted from *Meeting Ellen White* by George R. Knight, pages 109-127. Available from Adventist Book Centers: 1-800-765-6955 or Review and Herald Publishing Association, 55 W. Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, MD 21740 U.S.A.]

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