

Ellen White and the Assurance of Salvation: Responding to a Critical View

[23 April 2014 at 01:09](#)

One critic wrote: Jason Smith, this is a well quoted statement of Ellen's, one that has caused a lot of problems for Adventists. It is also soundly dismissed by Adventist/EGW apologists as "Taken out of context" and "misrepresented".

: *"Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or feel that they are saved. Those who accept Christ, and in their first confidence say, I am saved, are in danger of trusting to themselves."* (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 155).

If what she says is true then one might logically ask...When a person believes, accepts Jesus, has faith and becomes a new Christian...

1. Does he/she not stand before God completely Justified?
2. Has he/she not been born again with the indwelling Holy Spirit?
3. Have not their sins, past present and future, not been forgiven?
4. Has God not forgotten them (sins) and "cast them into the sea" or put them away "as far as the east is from the west"?
5. If the answer to items 1-4 are "yes", can't they not legitimately claim, "I am saved"? [End Quote]

Brother, Lord willing, I will address the rest of your quote (the questions) at a later time. For the time being though I want to deal with the statement that you question if it is true. Now you are right that this is "a well quoted statement" from Mrs. White and it has caused a lot of problems for Adventists, and especially former Adventists. However you are 100% incorrect when you say that it is "soundly dismissed" by Adventist/EGW apologists as being "taken out of context" and "misrepresented."

Now please do not misunderstand what I am saying here. The critics (and I am yet to see an exception) most certainly do lift this statement out of its context and misinterpret it (your own quoting of it is no exemption as I will shortly demonstrate) but my point is that the statement is not dismissed. It is interpreted contextually and believed. I will also demonstrate this. **And, when this is done, it can be seen to be in perfect harmony with the greater light of God's Word.**

Now imagine if you will a professed Christian who reads the following text.

"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor 10:12)

This individual then, on the basis of this verse, begins to argue that there is no such thing as an assurance of salvation because of the possibility of falling. And he adds to this verse numerous other Scriptures which declare the same or a very similar thing (i.e. the possibility of falling from grace through legalism (Gal 5:4), the danger of drawing back into perdition (Heb 10:39), the warning about getting entangled in the pollution of the world again and overcome by it (2 Pet 2:20) etc,...)

My brother, how would you respond to such an one? How would you show him his error? Here's what I would do. After praying and asking God for the outpouring of His Spirit I would open the Word to show him the following things.

- 1) **The context of the statements he has used indicates that while falling away is possible it does not have to happen. Thus there really can be an assurance of salvation even with these warnings.**
- 2) **He has ignored the plethora of Bible statements which directly say that there can be and is an assurance of salvation for the believer.**
- 3) **He has also ignored the harmonious balance between the statements that can be seen in the Scriptures which reveal the conditions under which one can have and maintain an assurance of salvation even in the here and now.**

I hope that you can see that by looking at the big picture- both the immediate and greater literary context of the Scriptures- the truth can be seen. Here is a short summary of the Biblical data on this matter from Jerry Moon. I have pasted it verbatim except that I have added a (b) to the conditions column data he provided more clear.

"The Biblical Evidence: A Brief Overview

a. PROMISES b. CONDITIONS

- (1a) John 6:37 (1b) Come to Christ
- (2a) John 10:14-15, 27-28 (2b) Know Christ
- (3a) John 15:1-8 (3b) Abide in Christ
- (4a) John 3:16-21 (4b) Believe, come to the light, live the truth
- (5a) 1 John 1:9 (5b) Confess our sins
- (6a) 1 John 5:10-13 (6b) Believe, be "in Christ"
- (7a) 2 Pet 1:5-11 (7b) Sanctification as evidence of salvation
- (8a) Heb 10:14 (8b) "Perfected forever" on condition that we continue in the relationship with Christ through which we are "being sanctified"

b. WARNINGS ABOUT POSSIBILITY OF FALLING

- (1a) Ezekiel 18: 21-24 (1b) A righteous person who turns away from righteousness will be punished with the wicked
- (2a) Matt 18:21-35 (2b) Forgiveness can be forfeited
- (3a) 1 Cor 9:27 (3b) Even a minister can fall away and be lost
- (4a) 1 Cor 10: 1-5, 12 (4b) Israelites, though "baptized," fell away. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."
- (5a) Gal 3:1-3; 5:4 (5b) "You have fallen from grace."
- (6a) Heb 3:12-14 (6) Beware of apostasy through unbelief
- (7a) Heb 6:4-8 (7b) Apostasy crucifies Christ again
- (8a) Heb 10:26-29, 36-38 (8b) Continuing in known sin tramples the Son of God underfoot; profanes the blood of the covenant, and insults the Spirit of grace
- (9a) 2 Peter 2:20-22 (9b) Better not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from it
- (10a) Jude 5 (10b) Once "saved," but later "destroyed"
- (11a) Rev 2:4-5, 25; 3:2-3, 11, 15-16
- (11b) Churches threatened with "removal" if they don't repent and change; those who endure to the end will be saved

c. PRESENT ASSURANCE, BASED ON THE WORD AND INNER WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

- (1) Rom 8:1, 14-17 (2) Gal 4:6-7 (3) Acts 5:32 (4) 1 John 3:18-22 (5) Luke 23:43 (2) Gal 4:6-7 (3) Acts 5:32 (4) 1 John 3:18-22 (5) Luke 23:43 [End Quote]

I would invite you to look up each and every one of these Bible verses to see these things for yourself. **The point here is that when we look at all the Biblical data the harmony is apparent. The believer is to have a present assurance of salvation but to avoid a presumptive view of his or her salvation.** Thus our friend who based his view off of partial evidence is clearly wrong.

Now in similar fashion to what our hypothetical example did with the Biblical data, many critics take hold of a few quotes from Mrs. White, which are really warnings against claiming salvation in a presumptuous way, and ignore the immediate and greater literary context. Thus they falsely make her out to be one who negated the assurance of salvation. To remedy their faulty research methodology we need to look at these contexts.

IMMEDIATE LITERARY CONTEXT:

Before I move on and show some of these neglected statements let's look more closely at the quote you gave. Earlier I promised to show how you misquoted this passage so let's look at the quote as you gave it.

Critic wrote: "*Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or feel that they are saved. Those who accept Christ, and in their first confidence say, I am saved, are in danger of trusting to themselves.*" (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 155).

Now let's look at the quote as it actually is. I will include more of the immediate literary context and also insert the 4 sentences which were between the two sentences which you used in your quote and which you left out. I will also put CAPS emphasis so that you can see what the literary context indicates the issue is.

“Peter’s fall was not instantaneous, but gradual. SELF-CONFIDENCE led him to the belief that HE WAS SAVED, and step after step was taken in the downward path, until he could deny his Master. NEVER CAN WE SAFELY PUT CONFIDENCE IN SELF, OR FEEL, this side of heaven, THAT WE ARE SECURE AGAINST TEMPTATION. Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught TO SAY OR TO FEEL that they are saved. This is misleading. Every one should be taught to cherish hope and faith; but even when we give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us, WE ARE NOT BEYOND THE REACH OF TEMPTATION. God’s word declares, “Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried.” Daniel 12:10. Only he who endures the trial will receive the crown of life. (James 1:12). {COL 155.1}

Those who accept Christ, and IN THEIR FIRST CONFIDENCE say, I am saved, ARE IN DANGER OF TRUSTING TO THEMSELVES. They lose sight of their own weakness and their constant need of divine strength. THEY ARE UNPREPARED FOR SATAN’S DEVICES, and under temptation many, like Peter, fall into the very depths of sin. We are admonished, “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” 1 Corinthians 10:12. OUR ONLY SAFETY IS IN CONSTANT DISTRUST OF SELF, AND DEPENDENCE ON CHRIST. {COL 155.2}

As anyone reading this statement in this context can tell Mrs. White is warning about saying that you are saved in a self-confident way, in a presumptuous way that ignores that we are still here in a world where we face temptation. **And notice that she does not say there is no safety at all but rather that “our only safety is in constant distrust of self, and dependence on Christ.” Thus the statement which many critics partially quote as supposed proof of her teaching no assurance actually states the opposite. It says there is safety but “only” in distrusting self and believing in Christ! I have never seen the critics give this quotation in its immediate context. They always leave this part out and that is an highly unfair, and dishonest tactic.**

GREATER LITERARY CONTEXT:

Again, as we saw with our Biblical example, if an individual only looks at the verses that give warnings about falling away a false view is obtained. In order to be fair to God's Word and obtain the correct view we must look at the whole picture and find the balance. This same interpretive principle must be used in order to see Mrs. White's view. The critics fail to do this and (purposefully?) ignore the plethora of statements that she about assurance of salvation. Here are some quotes that need to be taken into consideration

Say to the world, Jesus is my Saviour; HE SAVES ME TODAY, making me his obedient child, and enabling me to keep all his commandments.”(ST, June 8, 1891)

Those who are true to God need not fear the power of men nor the enmity of Satan. IN CHRIST THEIR ETERNAL LIFE IS SECURE. Their only fear should be lest they surrender the truth, and thus betray the trust with which God has honored them. {DA 356.1}

“Faith comes by the word of God. Then grasp His promise, ‘Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.’ John 6:37. Cast yourself at His feet with the cry, ‘Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.’ YOU CAN NEVER PERISH WHILE YOU DO THIS-- NEVER” (DA 429).

WE ARE NOT TO DOUBT HIS MERCY, AND SAY, I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER I SHALL BE SAVED OR NOT.' By living faith we must lay hold of his promise, for He has said, 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow' (ST, April 4, 1892, par. 3)

This is a matter to be settled between God and your own soul, settled for eternity. A SUPPOSED HOPE, AND NOTHING MORE, will prove your ruin" (SC 35.1)

"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). WE NEED NOT HAVE A SUPPOSED HOPE, BUT AN ASSURANCE. " (19MR 351)

"WE MUST NOT BASE OUR SALVATION UPON SUPPOSITION; WE MUST KNOW OF A SURETY THAT CHRIST IS FORMED WITHIN, the hope of glory...Then if He should come to us quickly, if by any chance our life should suddenly be ended, WE SHOULD BE READY TO MEET OUR GOD" (Ms 21, 1903)

"Each one of you may know for yourself that you have a living Saviour, that he is your helper and your God. YOU NEED NOT STAND WHERE YOU SAY, I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER I AM SAVED." Do you believe in Christ as your personal Saviour? If you do, then rejoice" (GCB April 10, 1901, par. 14).

"The message from God to me for you is 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out' (John 6:37). If you have nothing else to plead before God but this one promise from your Lord and Saviour, YOU HAVE THE ASSURANCE THAT YOU WILL NEVER, NEVER BE TURNED AWAY. It may seem to you that you are hanging upon a single promise, but appropriate that one promise and it will open to you the whole treasure house of the riches of the grace of Christ. Cling to that promise and you are safe. 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.' Present this assurance to Jesus, and YOU ARE AS SAFE AS THOUGH INSIDE THE CITY OF GOD." (10MR 175)

"THE PERISHING SINNER MAY SAY: 'I am a lost sinner; but Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He says, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17). I am a sinner, and He died upon Calvary's cross to save me. I NEED NOT REMAIN A MOMENT LONGER UNSAVED. He died and rose again for my justification, and HE WILL SAVE ME NOW. I accept the forgiveness He has promised'" (1SM 392).

"IT IS ESSENTIAL TO BELIEVE YOU ARE SAVED" (RH, Nov. 1, 1892)

"SIMPLE FAITH IN THE ATONING BLOOD CAN SAVE MY SOUL; and with John, I must call the attention of all to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. JESUS HAS SAVED ME, though I had nothing to present to him... (RH, July 14, 1891, par. 11-13).

"IT IS ESSENTIAL TO HAVE FAITH IN JESUS, AND TO BELIEVE YOU ARE SAVED THROUGH HIM... (1 SM 373)

"IF YOU ARE RIGHT WITH GOD TODAY, YOU ARE READY IF CHRIST SHOULD COME TODAY"(In Heavenly Places, 227)

You see my brother, just as it was when we discussed the topic of justification by faith, so it is with this topic- the assurance of salvation. Mrs. White believed it and taught it. It is only by viewing her quotes which speak against presumption in isolation that an individual can obtain and maintain a false view on the matter (and even then like with the example from COL 155 you have to ignore parts of it!)

The salient point here is that the same balance that we see in the Bible (see the data above) is the same balance that exists in her writings. This balance, in God's Word and the testimonies is why I live with a present assurance of salvation and it's really quite wonderful! I know that if Jesus came today I am ready to go with Him! And that's great news for the Lord's coming is at hand! So maranatha! In concluding this document I will leave you with the words of the apostle Peter which show us how we can have our calling and election made sure.

2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, 3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: 4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; 7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. 8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. 10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: 11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 1:2-11)