

# The Danger of Doubt and the Nature of Faith: "Judge-From-the-Weight-of-Evidence" (Science and Religion, Doubt and Faith--Part II)

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## Introduction

1. Christianity is, by definition, a "reasonable" religion. It places a high (but not ultimate) value upon the exercise of sanctified human reason.
  - a. Jesus invites each one: "Come, let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18).
  - b. EGW had no use for shoddy thinking; she repeatedly affirmed and placed a high premium upon the "kingly power of reason," subject only to the governance of divine revelation (MH 130:2)..
2. As noted, Christianity, also, is a "revealed" religion; and, at times, faith must take precedence over "Reason," when and where God has clearly spoken.
3. Doubt and faith are categories with which EGW dealt frequently; and the CD-ROM disc of her published writings lists:
  - a. 2,076 references to the word "doubt," and
  - b. 25,215 references to its antithesis, "faith."
4. The human mind is perfectly capable of believing anything it wishes to believe--and of doubting anything it wishes to doubt.
  - a. I have always been extremely interested in the various reasons offered to explain why some choose to join the Adventist Church--and why others subsequently choose to leave it its fellowship.
  - b. I have also been keenly interested in the various reasons why different ones choose to believe in EGW as a true prophet--and why some, subsequently, decide to believe she was *not* a true prophet.
5. Sometimes the reasons for such choices are "objective," in that they are based upon alleged "facts" which are accepted as true; sometimes they are "subjective," in that they are based upon emotional reasons (and sometimes even private agendas)--of which the holder may even be totally unaware!
6. Why, then, do some persons choose to disbelieve the genuineness of Ellen White's prophetic gift?
  - a. Let us examine a few of the reasons advanced by some who have become disaffected--noting, also, some of the "real" reasons adduced by EGW herself!

## I. Reasons for Disbelief in the Genuineness of EGW's Prophetic Gift

### A. Theological Reasons

1. **Ellen White Taught False Doctrines:** It is alleged by some—often sincerely, though (we believe) mistakenly—that EGW taught unbiblical doctrines; therefore, they reject her on this ground.

a. If she *were guilty* of doing so, this would, indeed, be a valid, legitimate reason for rejecting her teachings.

b. But if one inquires further into the specifics, such may well discover that the alleged "false doctrine" was truly Biblical after all!

(1) For the rejecter himself/herself may hold one or more unbiblical *a priori* beliefs (which they sincerely believe to be Biblical) which may unwittingly lead them astray.

2. Some of the following doctrinal positions (which SDAs hold to be unbiblical) are denied by EGW—but that denial, nevertheless, does not demonstrate she teaches false doctrines; rather, it is the holder, in reality, who is himself/herself unbiblical:

a. That the Holy Spirit-given gift of prophetic utterance ended with the end of the Apostolic age (c. 100 A.D.): therefore, there is not now even the possibility of the existence of a genuine prophet in modern times.

b. That everything to do with achieving mankind's salvation—Christ's atonement—was completed at Calvary: therefore, such doctrines as the heavenly sanctuary, the investigative judgment, etc. are all unbiblical.

c. That New Testament Christians are no longer obliged to keep the Law under the New Covenant of Grace: therefore, Sabbath-observance is only a legalistic attempt to earn salvation, which is condemned by the New Testament.

4. That all Old Testament food-taboos are abolished under the New Covenant: therefore, I am free to eat/drink anything I choose; the Christian religion has no legitimate concern with such considerations.

5. That the human soul is immortal: therefore, human consciousness continues beyond death, and the doctrine of "soul-sleep" (conditional immortality) is unbiblical.

6. That God's wrath will continue "forever" to be expressed in the eternal punishing (vs. eternal punishment) of the finally impenitent: therefore, the doctrine of annihilation is false and pernicious.

### B. Perceptual Reasons

1. **Ignorance of the Facts:** no prior information concerning her or her gift.

a. It is often a facet of human nature that one tends to be "down" upon things upon which he/she is not "up" on.

b. EGW is, thus, simply rejected out of hand, without any effort to "prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21) and to "try the spirits" (1 John 4:1), as Scripture requires.

2. **Misperception of the "Real" EGW:** Some say, "I see her as the product of a now-bygone Victorian era, a little old lady, wearing high button-down boots, who never smiles, and who sits on a high stool, with gloomy visage, pointing a bony, craggy finger at the youth of her church, and saying to them, petulantly, in a high, screeching voice, "Whatever it is that you're doing, if it's fun, stop it *immediately!*" She is misperceived as:
  - a. A dour, humorless, unpleasant person.
  - b. Unduly restrictive and "anti-fun."
  - c. The source of a certain form of "child-abuse," in which the youth are "hit-over-the-head" with her writings, or "forced-down-the-throat" by parents, teachers, and ministers, etc.
  - d. One totally out-of-touch with contemporary reality.

### **C. Psychological Reasons:**

1. **Emotional Trauma From Discovery** that one's theory of Inspiration/Revelation does not harmonize with the reality of the data--the actual facts of how it really operated are at variance with my prior views as to how I was sure that it worked.
  - a. This is often the problem with believers in a strictly verbal/mechanical view of Inspiration/Revelation.
    - (1) This was the problem with John the Baptist--he, and all Israel (including Christ's own disciples) believed the Messiah would be a geopolitical--rather than a spiritual--ruler.
  - b. And the danger, upon discovery that things were not really as we had expected, is that we may go and "throw-the baby-out-with-the-bath-water."
2. **"Theory of Cognitive Dissonance:"** Leon Festinger (the most-cited social psychologist in university textbooks between 1960 and 1968) developed this "law" in 1957: If your beliefs (A) are over on the right-hand side, and your behavior (B) is over on the left-hand side, you will ultimately do one of three things:
  - a. You will relocate A to where B is.
  - b. Or you will relocate B to where A is.
  - c. Or you will quickly lose the balance of your mind.

### **D. Seven "Real" Reasons Offered by EGW for Doubt/Rejection of Her Counsels**

#### **1. Love of Sin:**

- a. "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7).
- b. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light. . . ." (John 3:19)
- c. "Disguise it as they may, the real cause of doubt and skepticism, in most cases, is the love of sin" (SC 111).

#### **2. Dislike of Being Rebuked:**

- a. "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (John 3:10).

- b. "The reason why men and women today do not believe the truth is because it condemns their life practices. They see that the truth calls for a reform and they fight it because they hate the work involved in sanctification. . . . (Ms 27, May 6, 1900; cited in UL 140:2).
- c. "The testimonies of His Spirit call your attention to the Scriptures, and point to your defects of character, and rebuke your sins; therefore you do not heed them. And to justify your carnal, ease-loving course you begin to doubt whether the testimonies are from God" (5T 234).
- d. "They rise up with bitter feelings against the ones who dare to speak of their errors and reprove their sins" (3T 328; 5T 672).
- e. "There are some in \_\_\_\_\_ who have never fully submitted to reproof. They have taken a course of their own choosing. They have ever, to a greater or less degree, exerted an influence against those who stood up to defend the right and reprove the wrong" (4T 513; 5T 673).
- f. "Some express their views that the testimony of Sister White cannot be reliable. . . . The testimonies of reproof have checked their vanity and pride" (3T 313; 5T 673).
- g. "You despise and reject the testimonies because they reprove your darling sins and disturb your self-complacency" (5T 49).
- h. "The question to be settled . . . is, 'Shall I deny myself and receive as of God the *Testimonies* which reprove my sins, or shall I reject the *Testimonies* because they reprove my sins?'" (4T 32; 5T 675).
- i. "There are some in these last days who will cry: 'Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits.' [Isa. 30:10.] But this is not my work. God has set me as a reprover of His people; and just so surely as He has laid upon me the heavy burden, He will make those to whom this message is given responsible for the manner in which they treat it" (4T 231, 232; 5T 679).
- j. "All will hear His voice who are willing to be corrected; but those who have been deceived by the enemy are not willing now to come to the light, lest their deeds shall be reproved" (5T 74).

### 3. Pride of Opinion:

- a. "The natural stubbornness of the human heart resists the light of truth. Its natural pride of opinion leads to independence of judgment and a clinging to human ideas and philosophy" (RH, Aug. 19, 1909; cited in HP 349:2).
- b. "The sin that is most nearly hopeless and incurable is pride of opinion, self-conceit. This stands in the way of all growth" (7T 199, 200).
- c. "Self-will and pride of opinion lead many to reject the light from heaven. They cling to pet ideas, fanciful interpretations of Scripture, and dangerous heresies; and if a testimony is borne to correct these errors, they will, like many in Christ's day, go away displeased" (1SM 72).
- d. "All self-sufficiency, egotism, and pride of opinion must be put away" (1SM 413).
- e. "Those who allow worldly interests, desire for popularity, for pride of opinion, to separate them from the truth, must render an account to God for their neglect" (4SP 186).
- f. "Light has been sent to dispel their darkness, but they are too proud of heart to accept it, and they choose the darkness. They despise the counsel of

God, because it does not coincide with their views and plans, and favor their wrong traits of character. The work of the Spirit of God, which would bring them into the right position if they would accept it, has not come in a way to please them, and to flatter their self-righteousness. . . . They claim that no more confidence is to be placed in the judgment of one who has had such a long experience, and whom the Lord has taught and used to do a special work [EGW], than in that of any other person" (5T 689).

g. "Yet now when I send you a testimony of warning and reproof, many of you declare it to be merely the opinion of Sister White. You have thereby insulted the Spirit of God" (5T 64).

h. "In a recent dream I was brought before an assembly of people, some of whom were making efforts to remove the impression of a most solemn testimony of warning that I had given them. They said: 'We believe Sister White's testimonies; but when she tells us things that she has not directly seen in vision in the particular case under consideration, her words are of no more account to us than the words of any other person.' . . .

"Now, if those to whom these solemn warnings are addressed say, 'It is only Sister White's individual opinion, I shall follow my own judgment,' . . . they show that they despise the counsel of God. . . . Some who wish to strengthen their own position . . . [take the position that] that which questions their course of action . . . [is] Sister White's opinion, denying its heavenly origin and [they place] it on a level with their own judgment. . . .

"If you feel just as safe in following your own impulse as in following the light given by God's delegated servant, the peril is your own; you will be condemned because you rejected light which heaven had sent you" (5T 687, 688).

**4. Ignorance from Indifferent Neglect to Read:**

a. "It is not alone those who openly reject the *Testimonies*, or who cherish doubt concerning them, that are on dangerous ground. To disregard light is to reject it" (5T 680).

b. "Many are going directly contrary to the light which God has given to His people, because they do not read the books which contain the light and knowledge in cautions, reproofs, and warnings. . . . Skepticism and infidelity are increasing everywhere. Light so precious coming from the throne of God, is hid under a bushel. God will make His people responsible for this neglect. An account must be rendered to Him for every ray of light He has let shine upon our pathway, whether it has been improved to our advancement in divine things or rejected because it was more agreeable to follow inclination" (4T 390, 391; 5T 681).

**5. Cowardice: Lack of Moral Courage:**

a. "[Sometimes] sinful indulgences are cherished, the *Testimonies* are rejected, and many excuses which are untrue are offered to others as the reason for refusing to receive them. The true reason is not given. It is a lack of moral courage—a will, strengthened and controlled by the Spirit of God, to

renounce hurtful habits" (4T 32; 5T 675).

#### **6. Lack of Spirituality:**

- a. "I was shown that many had so little spirituality that they did not understand the value of the *Testimonies* or their real object. They talked flippantly of the *Testimonies* given by God for the benefit of His people, and passed judgment upon them, giving their opinion and criticizing this and that, when they would better have placed their hands upon their lips, and prostrated themselves in the dust; for they could not appreciate the spirit of the *Testimonies*, because they knew so little of the Spirit of God" (4T 443; 5T 672, 673).

#### **7. Prevailing Spirit of Skepticism:**

- a. "A prevailing skepticism is continually increasing in reference to the *Testimonies* of the Spirit of God; and these youths encourage questionings and doubts instead of removing them, because they are ignorant of the spirit and power and force of the *Testimonies*" (4T 437; 5T 672).

## **II. Ellen G. White and the Nature of Faith**

### **A. The Problem Identified**

1. Faith is so vital, so fundamental, so basic, that God Himself declares emphatically that "without faith it is impossible to please Him."
  - a. Indeed, the very first steps for any who would come to Him are to:
    - (1) "Believe that He is"—that is, that He exists; and also
    - (2) "That He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him"—that is, that He is actively seeking to bless those who try to follow Him (Heb. 11:6).
2. Jesus emphasized the importance of exercising faith throughout His entire earthly ministry.
  - a. At its beginning, in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), he urged His hearers to exercise faith in God as a Heavenly "Father" who valued them highly and who would care for all of their temporal (as well as spiritual) needs.
  - b. At its end, in the Upper Room, He gently reproved "doubting" Thomas by telling him, "Be not faithless, but believing" (John 20:27; see DA 808).
    - (1) But the opposite condition of faithlessness—faith—comprehends much more than mere belief (though that is included).

### **B. Contemporary Models of Faith**

#### **1. Faith-as-Simply-Intellectual-Belief:**

- a. EGW referred to this limited view of faith in these words: "Many hold faith [merely] as an opinion" (DA 347:1)—as simply an intellectual assent to a list of doctrinal propositions.

- b. Satan and his fallen angels "believe;" but they hardly exercise true faith; instead, they simply "tremble" (Jas. 2:9) in "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:27).
- c. Now there *is* a sense in which it is correct to equate faith with a doctrinal construct:
  - (1) Jude speaks of "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).
  - (2) But this is, at best, a limited, partial view.
- d. And God probably honors its exercise by the babes-in-Christianity who are just learning to walk "after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1, 4; 2 Cor. 5:7).
- e. But EGW would strongly contrast this limited, partial view with what she would characterize as "living faith," "saving faith," which certainly includes this, but goes much farther (DA 347:1--see below).

## 2. Faith-as-an-Emotional-Leap-in-the-Dark:

- a. For others, faith is seen simply as an emotional (and, ultimately, an irrational) "leap-in-the-dark-and-hope-you-land-on-your-feet!"
- b. This partial, limited view also possesses an element of truth.
- c. And God probably does honor this exercise if the individual is sincere, doing the best he/she can with limited information/knowledge and understanding.
- d. But God would also say to such, "Come, let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18).
- e. And Paul would doubtless add, by way of an offer of help: "I show you a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31).

## 3. Faith-as-"Coming"- "Casting"- "Taking"- "Learning"- "Finding"--a NT Model:

- a. "Coming": "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).
- b. "Casting": "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7).
- c. "Taking": "Take My yoke upon you and . . ."
- d. "Learning": "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and . . ."
- e. "Finding": "Ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29).

## 4. Faith-as-Process-Within-a-Relationship:

- a. For EGW, "Genuine faith is life"--with discernable resulting experiential consequences:
  - (1) "A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power" (DA 347:1).
- b. She also spoke, almost in the same breath, of "saving faith;" and both in terms of two metaphors as instructive as they are interesting: "a *transaction* by which those who receive Christ join themselves in *covenant relationship* with God" (*ibid.*; emphasis supplied).
  - (1) "Transaction" sees faith in terms of *process*; whereas
  - (2) "Covenant Relationship" sees this process operating within the context of a personal *relationship*.
- c. Significantly, both of these metaphors involve *reciprocal obligations* and *responsibilities* on the part of both parties involved--you, and God--in this process-within-a-relationship.

- (1) EGW sees *God* first taking the initiative, in which He performs four acts:
  - (2) Then--and only then--she sees God asking the *human* to perform three tasks subsequently, of his/her own volition (but always with God's help).
- d. These seven steps in faith-as-process-within-a-relationship will now be explicated more fully.

### C. Faith-as-Process-Within-a-Relationship Defined: The SEVEN STEPS--

1. GOD'S PART: God takes the initiative and first performs four tasks before ever He comes to ask any response on our part:

**[Step 1]** God has endowed every human mind with the capacity and "power to discriminate between right and wrong" (DA 458:3; variant, 1BC 1120).

- a. In Bible times, God instructed His priests to:

- (1) "Put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean" (Lev. 10:10; cf. 11:47).
- (2) "Teach My people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (Ezek. 44:23).

- b. "The power to discriminate between right and wrong we can possess only through individual dependence upon God. Each for himself [herself] is to learn from Him through His Word. Our reasoning powers were given us for use, and God desires them to be exercised. 'Come now, and let us reason together' (Isa. 1:18), He invites us. In reliance upon Him we may have wisdom to 'refuse the evil, and choose the good'" (Isa. 7:15; Jas. 1:5) (Ed 231:1).

- c. Despite the fact that God has endowed each individual with the *capacity* to distinguish mentally between right and wrong, that power can be destroyed through conformity to "worldly customs, worldly practices, and worldly influences" (5T 62:2; cf. PK 178:1; RH, Nov. 6, 1913:2). God endows the human mind "with power to discriminate between right and wrong" (DA 458:3; 1BC 1120).

**[Step 2]** God deals "to every man [and woman]" a "measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3).

- a. "Faith that enables us to receive God's gifts is itself a gift, of which some measure is imparted to every human being" (Ed 253:4).
- b. While the Christian's faith-deposit "must be strengthened by fervent prayer, and fasting, and humiliation of heart" (DA 431:2), such effort itself would be useless if God had not first given a "measure" of faith "as a grain of mustard seed" (Matt. 17:20; Luke 17:6).

**[Step 3]** God next sends "light" [messages].

- a. "The Word of the Lord comes to all who have not rejected the Spirit by determining not to hear and obey. . . . It is the Lord's message of light to His people" (5T 69:0; cited in 1SM 28:1).

- b. "God gives light to guide those who honestly desire light and truth. . . ." (5T 303:1).

**[Step 4] Finally, God gives evidence of the divine origin of these messages:**

- a. "God never asks us to believe without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith" (SC 105:2).
  - (1) "Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration" (*Ibid.*; cf. 5T 69:0; 1SM 28:0; Ed 169:2).
- b. Quantitatively, EGW characterizes that evidence, variously, as:
  - (1) "Sufficient" (SC 105:2; 106:2; PP 432:2; 5T 303:1; 4T 232:1 [cited in 5T 675, 676]; 1SM 72:3; 3SG 94:3; Lt 6, 1877 [cited in MR 119] Ed 169:2; PP 434: 2,3).
  - (2) "Abundant" (SC 105:2).
  - (3) "Ample" (Ed 169:2; GC 527:2; 4T 584:3-585:0).
  - (4) "Plenty of" (4T 584:3-585:0; SC 105:2).
  - (5) "Additional" (PP 434:2, 3).
  - (6) "Continual" (8T 260:2; 6Bio 78:3).
- c. Qualitatively, EGW characterizes this evidence, variously, as:
  - (1) "Testimony that appeals to our reason" (SC 105:2; Ed 169:2).
  - (2) "Unmistakable" (PP, 434:2, 3).

**2. OUR PART:** After God has taken these first four steps, He then—and only then—asks us, to follow on to perform three acts:

**[Step 5] Examine this God-given evidence in an appropriate manner, with correct attitudes:**

- a. **Submission:** Acknowledgment of the limitations ("weakness" and "narrowness") of unaided finite human reason, and the utter inability of humans ever to completely comprehend God's works and truth—the finite can never, fully, grasp—much less explain—the Infinite (SC 105-108).
  - (1) While properly respecting human reason, seeking to keep it within its proper sphere, and seeking to exercise, develop, and improve our mental powers, we must also beware of deifying human reason (SC 109, 110).
  - (2) God must always be approached with reverence and awe (SC 107, 108, 110:0, 1).
  - (3) We must recognize Satan's ever-present efforts to distort truth (SC 108:2; 110:1)
  - (4) We must at all times earnestly solicit the aid of the Holy Spirit in comprehending and appreciating truth (SC 109:2; 110:0, 1).
- b. **Humility:**
  - (1) All pride must be abandoned (SC 108:2).
  - (2) Childlike simplicity, faith, and trust must be actively cultivated (SC 106:1; 110:0).
  - (3) A "humble mind" and "teachable spirit" must always characterize the investigation of truth (3T 255; cited in 5T

675:3).

c. **Patience must always be exercised to accept:**

- (1) God's ways (SC 106:1).
- (2) God's time (SC 107:0; 108:2).

d. **Intellectual sincerity/honesty:**

- (1) Our motivation must be characterized by "a sincere desire to know the truth"--wherever it may lead us--rather than merely to confirm previously-held opinions and conclusions; the heart must be willing to obey (SC 111:1).
- (2) We must not be seeking for loopholes through which we may evade/escape the claims of God (SC 110:1).

e. **Total commitment to God's will for our lives:**

- (1) Our thoughts and affections must be fixed upon God (SC 110:1).
- (2) We must be in harmony with His will (SC 110:1, 111:1).

f. **Diligent care in study:**

- (1) The evidence provided by God "must be carefully investigated" (3T 255:1; cited in 5T 675:3).
- (2) There must be a "carefully comparing" of "Scripture with Scripture" (DA 458:3).

**[Step 6] Arrive at a verdict based upon the *preponderant* weight of that evidence just examined:**

- a. "God designs that men [and women] shall not decide from impulse [emotion], but from [the] *weight of evidence*. . . . Before them are light and darkness, truth and error. It is for them to decide which they will accept (DA 458:3; emphasis supplied; cf. 1BC 1120).
- b. "He requires of His people faith that rests upon *the weight of evidence*, not upon perfect knowledge" (3T 258:2; emphasis supplied).
- c. "There are noble women who have had moral courage to decide in favor of the truth from *the weight of evidence*. They have conscientiously accepted the truth" (RH, Dec. 19, 1878; cited in Ev 478:4; emphasis supplied).
- d. "All should decide from *the weight of evidence*" (3T 255:1; cited in 5T 675:3; emphasis supplied).
- e. "There is no excuse for doubt or skepticism. God has made ample provision to establish the faith of all men [and women], if they will decide from *the weight of evidence* (4T 583:3; emphasis supplied).

**[Step 7] Live and act in accordance with the verdict just rendered on the evidence that God has been pleased to provide--remembering that obedience is not legalism; and the latter is rejected by Scripture, while the former is required by God.**

- a. "In order to arrive at truth, we must have . . . a willingness of heart to obey it. . . . Instead of questioning and caviling concerning that which you do not understand, give heed to the light that already shines upon you, and you will receive greater light. By the grace of Christ, perform every duty that has been made plain to your understanding, and you will be enabled to understand and perform

those of which you are now in doubt (SC 111:1, 2; cf. GC 528:1).

- b. "The Lord has given counsel and instruction; the duty of each individual has been made so plain that he [she] need make no mistake. . . . He [God] gives sufficient evidence to found faith upon, and then requires men [and women] to accept that evidence and exercise faith. . . . He who will study the Bible with a humble and teachable spirit will find it a sure guide, pointing out the way of life with unflinching accuracy. But what does your study of the Bible avail, brethren, unless you practice the truth it teaches?" (5T 302:2-303:2; cf. 5T 675:3; cited in 3T 255:1).
- c. "Those followers of Christ who accept the light that God sends them must obey the voice of God speaking to them when there are many other voices crying out against it. It requires discernment to distinguish the voice of God" (3T 258:2).
- d. ". . . . True obedience . . . is an . . . implicit trust in the words of Christ, in spite of objectional past experience. Our first lesson is to learn the will of God, even though we pass through trying circumstances, and then, knowing His will, to obey unquestioningly. Such obedience will always be rewarded" (Ms 79, Oct. 1, 1906; cited in UL 288:6)
- e. "The Lord requires us to obey the voice of duty, when there are other voices all around us urging us to pursue an opposite course. It requires earnest attention from us to distinguish the voice which speaks from God. We must resist and conquer inclination, and obey the voice of conscience without parleying or compromise, lest its promptings cease and will and impulse control" (5T 69:0; cited in 1SM 28).
- f. "Faith in Christ always leads to willing, cheerful obedience. . . . There is to be perfect conformity in thought, word, and deed, to the will of God. Heaven is only for those who have purified their souls through obedience to the truth" (Lt 301, Nov. 2, 1904; cited in TDG 315).

#### **IV. The Anatomy of Doubt**

1. One might come to the conclusion that everything EGW had to say about doubt was in a negative vein.
  - a. However, a closer inspection seems to indicate that not all that she wrote—or that appears in Scripture—is a "downer on doubt."
  - b. There appears to be a place for "good doubt"—a term that is not an oxymoron!

##### **A. Constructive "Doubt:" Suspension of Judgment Pending Investigation**

1. The Bereans probably did not doubt the teachings of Paul, Luke, and the other Apostles; but they also were not gullible, or "uncritical." For we are told by Luke that the Bereans:

- a. Were open-minded, open to new truth: "They received the word with all readiness of mind."
  - b. But, apparently in contrast with the ("less-noble") Thessalonian Christians, "searched the Scriptures daily" in an effort to determine "whether those things [the teachings of the apostles] were so" (Acts 17:11).
  - c. Their motivation may not have been one of "doubt"--at least in the classical sense; but they certainly wanted to validate the teachings of these Apostles (in apparent contrast to the Thessalonians, who apparently reasoned that Paul and Luke already possessed the two highest spiritual gifts--apostleship and prophecy--and, therefore, whatever they said must be so!).
2. Perhaps this was what EGW had in mind when she contrasted "true independence of mind" with "rashness:"
- a. "True independence of mind is an element entirely different from rashness. That quality of independence which leads to a cautious, prayerful; deliberate opinion should not be easily yielded, not until the evidence is sufficiently strong to make it certain that we are wrong. This independence will keep the mind calm and unchangeable amidst the multitudinous errors which prevail, and will lead those in responsible positions to look carefully at the evidence on every side, and not be swayed by the influence of others, or by the surroundings, to form conclusions without intelligent thorough knowledge of all the circumstances" (3T 104:3-105:0).
3. Perhaps this attitude is illustrated not so much by "I don't think this is so," as by "Maybe it is, maybe it isn't; but I'm going to check it out first, before I buy into it." In other words, "Why is this so?"
4. At any rate, most of what EGW says about the role of doubt in the Christian experience is on a cautionary--if not negative--note.

## B. Destructive Doubt

1. **The Special Work of Satan:** "It has been the special work of Satan to lead fallen man to rebel against God's government. . . . In the last days the earth will be almost destitute of true faith" (3SG 94:2, 3).
  - a. "Satan is [ever] at hand to suggest a variety of doubts. . . ." (4T 232:1).
  - b. During Christ's earthly ministry, "Satan was ready to suggest doubt" (DA 457:2).
  - c. "Satan has ability to suggest doubts and to devise objections to the pointed testimony that God sends, and many think it a virtue, a mark of intelligence in them, to be unbelieving and to question and quibble" (3T 255:1; cited in 5T 675:3).
    - (1) "Men of small minds delight to quibble, to criticize, to seek for something to question, thinking this a mark of sharpness; but instead it shows a mind lacking in refinement and elevation" (4T 445:0).

(2) "All who desire to question and cavil will find occasion" to do so (1SM 72:3).

2. **The Attitude of God:** We have already noted, above, that God gives abundant evidence, and then expects humans to judge from the preponderant weight of that evidence.

a. "God does not compel men [women] to give up their unbelief. Before them are light and darkness, truth and error. It is for them to decide which they will accept" (DA 458:3; cf. 1BC 1120 for a variant reading).

b. "While God has given ample evidence for faith, He will never remove all excuse for unbelief. All who look for hooks to hang their doubts upon will find them" (GC 527:2; cf. 3SM 68:3; 9MR 204:1; ST, June 8, 1882:24; RH, Mar. 11, 1890:09).

(1) "God will never remove from any man [woman] all causes for doubt" (4T 232:1). "God has never removed the possibility of doubt" (SC 105:2).

(2) "It is God's plan to give sufficient evidence . . . . But He never removes all opportunity for doubt. All who desire to question and cavil will find occasion" (1SM 72:3).

(3) "God will never remove every occasion for doubt. He gives sufficient evidence on which to base faith, but if this is not accepted the mind is left in darkness" (PP 432:2).

(4) "God gives light to guide those who honestly desire light and truth; but it is not His purpose to remove all cause for questioning and doubt. He gives sufficient evidence to found faith upon, and then requires men [women] to accept that evidence and exercise faith" (5T 303:1).

(5) "Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith" (SC 105:2).

### 3. God's Reason:

a. It is the immutable testimony of both Old and New Testaments that God's desire and plan is that "the just [the righteous child of God] shall live by his [her] faith" (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17).

b. It is abundantly clear that were God to remove all opportunity and occasion for us to doubt, *He would, also, simultaneously, remove from us all opportunity to exercise faith!*

### 4. The Certain Consequence:

a. "Those who refuse to accept and obey God's word until *every* objection has been removed, and there is no longer an opportunity for doubt, will *never* come to the light" (GC 527:2).

b. "Many will defer their obedience . . . waiting till *every* shadow of uncertainty is removed from their minds. The unbelief that demands *perfect* knowledge will *never yield* to the evidence that God is pleased to give. He requires of His people faith that rests upon *the weight of evidence*, not upon perfect knowledge. . . . Those who will not act when the Lord calls them, but who wait for more certain evidence and more favorable opportunities, will walk

in darkness, for the light [that they presently have] will be withdrawn. The evidence given one day, if rejected, may never be repeated (3T 258:2, 3; emphasis supplied).

c. "If you refuse to believe until every shadow of uncertainty and every possibility of doubt is removed, you will never believe. The doubt that demands perfect knowledge will never yield to faith (1SM 28:0, emphasis supplied; cf. also 5T 68:4; 69:0).

d. "Those who love to dwell in the atmosphere of doubt and questioning unbelief can have the unenviable privilege. God gives sufficient evidence for the candid mind to believe; but he [she] who turns from the weight of evidence because there are a few things he [she] cannot make plain to his [her] finite mind will be left in the cold, chilling atmosphere of unbelief and questioning doubts, and will make shipwreck of faith. . . . Jesus never praised unbelief; He never commended doubts" (4T 232:1-233:0; portion cited in 5T 675, 676; emphasis supplied).

e. EGW's use of the metaphor "shipwreck" is both highly interesting and especially instructive.

(1) She was not the first, of course, to employ it in the context of those who end their lives upon the stark, tragic rocks of apostasy.

(a) The Apostle Paul thrice experienced the devastating trauma of actual shipwreck during his missionary journeys (2 Cor. 11:28).

(b) And for him this metaphor of the ultimate failure of the Christian was most gripping and compelling (1 Tim. 1:19).

(2) I have twice witnessed the graphic, gripping end results of shipwreck:

(a) As a boy of five I saw, in the breakers off the beach at Ocean City, NJ, the broken skeletal remains of a ship which foundered in the coastal breakers, and was lost at that place.

(b) Then, as an adult, some three decades later, on our first furlough from mission service in Africa, we visited a fjord in north Norway where a now partially-submerged Nazi submarine had been destroyed while hiding in a cove during the latter days of World War II; and its shattered, rusted remains moved gently with the ebb and flow of the tide.

(3) In the first of these tragedies, there apparently were two causes of the disaster, which find their parallel in my simile:

(a) "Faith" failed: the vessel's engine, which had provided thrust to propel the ship forward through the sea, somehow now failed to function; and she then lay dead in the water.

(b) And then "Doubt" took over: the vessel sprang a leak, or perhaps a hatch was inadvertently left open, the interior of the vessel flooding with seawater. The ship subsequently capsized and sank; and all hands on board were lost.

(4) And the sea, which once buoyed them up (for "in genuine faith there is a buoyancy, a steadfast principle, which neither time nor toil can weaken"--(YI, Apr. 21, 1898; cited in SD 191:4), making forward progress possible, now clutched them to it's depths in tragic loss of all crew and cargo.

- (a) Water should stay outside a ship, and air should stay inside the ship.
- (b) And, in a certain sense, this is true of Christians, as well.

## 5. The Inevitable Result:

### a. For Doubt:

- (1) "Distrust of God is the natural outgrowth of the unrenewed heart, which is at enmity with Him. But faith is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it will flourish only as it is cherished. No man [woman] can become strong in faith without a determined effort. *Unbelief* [as, also, faith] *strengthens as it is encouraged*; and if men, instead of dwelling upon the evidence which God has given to sustain their faith, permit themselves to question and cavil, they will find their doubts *constantly becoming more confirmed*" (GC 527:3; emphasis supplied).
- (2) "No amount of evidence will convince men [women] of the truth so long as they are unwilling to yield their pride, subdue their carnal nature, and become learners in the school of Christ. Self-will and pride of opinion lead many to reject the light from heaven. They cling to their pet ideas, fanciful interpretations of Scripture, and dangerous heresies; and if a testimony is borne to correct these errors, they will, like many in Christ's day, go away displeased" (1SM 72:4, 5).

### b. For Faith:

- (1) "Faith is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it will flourish only as it is cherished (GC 527:3).
- (2) "Faith grows by conflict with doubts . . . ." (YI, April, 1873; cited in SD 191:2)
- (3) "No man [woman] can become strong in faith without a determined effort" (GC 527:3).
- (4) "There are deep mysteries in the Word of God, which will never be discovered by minds unaided by the Holy Spirit" (4T 444:1).

## 6. "Faith is the Victory:"

- a. "For whosoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4; cf. 1 Cor. 15:57).
- b. "A religious experience is obtained only through" four important avenues:
  - (1) "Conflict." (3) "Severe discipline of self."
  - (2) "Disappointment." (4) "Earnest prayer."--"Living faith must grasp the promises unflinchingly. . . ." (4T 444:2).
- c. "We shall advance in true spiritual knowledge only as we realize our own littleness and our entire dependence upon God; but *all* who come to the Bible with a teachable and prayerful spirit, to study its utterances as the Word of God, *will receive divine enlightenment*. There are many things apparently difficult or obscure which God will make plain and simple to those who thus seek an understanding of them" (5T 704:1; emphasis supplied).

- d. "Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit we shall be continually liable to wrest the Scriptures or to misinterpret them" (5T 704:2).
- e. "There is but one course for those to pursue who honestly desire to be freed from doubts. Instead of questioning and caviling concerning that which they do not understand, let them give heed to the light which already shines upon them, and they will receive greater light. Let them do every duty which has been made plain to their understanding, and they will be enabled to understand and perform those of which they are now in doubt" (GC 528:1; cf. SC 1111,2).

## V. Bringing It All Together; Making It All Work

### A Some Ultimate Realities

1. As noted above, the human mind is perfectly capable of believing anything it wishes to believe; and, conversely, perfectly capable of disbelieving anything it wishes to disbelieve.
  - a. Because, ultimately, both faith and doubt are a decision made by the individual Christian's will.
    - (1) And, as EGW has so often reminded us, *everything* depends upon the right action of the will! (SC 47; emphasis supplied).
      - (a) (See J. R. Spangler, "The Two Mind Sets," *Ministry*, June, 1982, pp. 4,5; in *Anthology*, I:82/38, 39.)
2. We need also to recognize that there are as yet a number of unresolved problems in the inspired writings of Scripture, as well as in those of EGW.
  - a. In New Testament times Peter found some things written by his fellow apostle and prophet, Paul, which—for Peter—were "hard to be understood" (2 Peter 3:16).
  - b. And Peter went on to caution Christians not to "wrest" inspired writings to their own destruction eternally, as did some of the truly "unlearned" and "unstable" of his own day.
  - c. Now if Peter found some things written by Paul "hard to be understood," is it necessarily a disaster if we, today, find some things in the EGW writings equally "hard to be understood"?
3. Remember that it is God—not mankind—who lays down the rules of the encounter with Him and with truth—the "ground rules" of the Great Controversy war in which we are all engaged.
  - a. He has already revealed to us, through "His servants, the prophets," that He has no intention of making *every* difficulty explained, *every* mystery made clear.
    - (1) Those things which God has revealed belong to us and to our children; but the secret, as-yet unrevealed, things belong to God alone (Deut. 29:29).

b. If God removed all opportunity for doubt, He would, simultaneously, remove from us all opportunity for the exercise of faith.

(1) And this, He has already told us, He does not intend to do!

(2) He gives sufficient, plausible, coercive evidence that He is leading out a people, and then asks them to exercise faith in the few remaining "unknowns."

## **B. A Scientist's Solution**

1. The late Dr. Frank Lewis Marsh, prolific SDA author on creation/evolution issues, who earned his Ph.D. in biology at the University of Nebraska, told an SDA Theological Seminary class in "Science and Religion" (1958) how he himself handled anomalies in science vis-a-vis the writings of EGW:

a. "I have a [metaphorical] 'shelf' in my mind."

b. "Whenever I, as a scientist, read something in the EGW writings that I—as a scientist—simply do not understand, on the basis of the available data, and therefore cannot explain, I do not 'sweat' it."

c. "Instead, I quietly, calmly place that issue upon the 'shelf' in my mind."

d. "And the thing that has most surprised me over the decades is *not* the number of things which I had to park on my 'shelf.'"

e. "Rather, the thing which has continually amazed me is the number of things I have subsequently been able to *take down* from off the shelf, as a consequence of further discoveries in the world of science."

2. In is interesting—and significant—to note that scientists, as a group, are generally much more willing to live with the tension produced by ambiguity and conflicting ideas and concepts, holding judgment in suspension, and patiently waiting for answers, until "the jury is in," than are many theologians, who often impatiently seek instantaneous answers and make snap judgments without full data.

## **C. The Pioneers and the Present**

1. The SDA Pioneers, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had to make up their minds about EGW, and her prophetic gift, and her unique place in our church, and the claims of her writings to our commitment and obedience.

a. And, in this, the Pioneers had one advantage—and one disadvantage:

(1) Their advantage? They had the living prophet within their midst; and if something were unclear, they could often seek clarification from the living prophet directly.

(2) Their disadvantage? They had to make up their minds about her and her writings without benefit of the incredible, unparalleled confirmation and corroboration from the world of science concerning a major category of her writings, that what she wrote was, indeed, not only correct, but often far ahead of the general thinking of her time!

2. Interestingly, we, today, also have the equal but opposite advantage and disadvantage:
  - a. Our disadvantage is that the prophet is no longer alive, to offer us additional insights, and to tell us what she meant by what she wrote.
  - b. But our advantage is that we have an overwhelming, preponderant "weight of evidence" of the validity of much of which she wrote in days gone by that was denied to the Pioneers.
  - c. And it is interesting to observe that at least one world-renowned scientist--Dr. Norman Kaplan--has told us that we no longer need exercise any faith to believe her health/lifestyle message today--for all of the principles--and much (if not most) of the detail--is now a matter of scientific data, proven beyond a shadow of a doubt!

## Conclusion

1. Let us seek, then, to avoid a particular pitfall into which Christians are often prone to fall, keeping in mind the following far-reaching inspired cautions:
  - [a] The words are an indication of that which is in the heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."
  - [b] But words are more than an indication of character; they have a power to react on the character.
    - [1] Men are influenced by their own words.
    - [2] Often under a momentary impulse, prompted by Satan, they give utterance to jealousy or evil surmising, expressing that which they do not really believe; but the expression reacts on the thoughts.
    - [3] They are deceived by their [own] words, and have come to believe true that which was spoken at Satan's instigation.
  - [c] Having once expressed an opinion or decision, they are often too proud to retract it, and they try to prove themselves in the right, until they come to believe that they are.
  - [d] It is dangerous to utter a word of doubt, dangerous to question and criticize divine light.
    - [1] The habit of careless and irreverent criticism reacts upon the character, in fostering irreverence and unbelief. Many a man indulging this habit has gone on unconscious of danger until he was ready to criticize and reject the work of the Holy Spirit--DA 323:1.
2. In a letter to A. T. Jones just after the turn of the century, EGW warned this habitually impulsive minister:
  - a. "Let not your lips utter a sentence of doubt. Do not come before the people with an uncertain sound. Know what is truth and proclaim truth. Christ's teaching was always positive in nature. Never, never utter sentiments of doubt. Bear with a certain voice an affirmative message" (Lt 65, Feb. 13, 1905; cited in UL 58:4).

3. Our choice, ultimately, is to do one of two things:

- (a) To "hang our doubts" upon "hooks" readily provided by Satan; or
- (b) To "hang your helpless soul on God."

(1) In an 1879 letter to her eldest surviving son, Edson, EGW borrowed a line from the second stanza of John Wesley's hymn written in 1740, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," and she wrote plaintively:

Your soul's salvation is in great peril, and now do not, I plead with you, deceive your own soul. If your faith perseveringly grasps the promises, you will prevail. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

...

Let your short, uncertain life be a continual preparation for the future immortal life. Temptation is allowed to come upon us to discover the character we possess and to improve our defects. There are continual solicitations to sin which are disguised to deceive and allure the soul to ruin. Satan will transform himself into an angel of light, and he is constantly plotting to rob God of His glory in the destruction of souls. I beseech you for your soul's sake to resist the devil that he may flee from you. Hang your helpless soul on God (Lt 42, Nov. 21, 1879; cited in HP 24.

4. So there you have it: hang your doubts on Satan's hooks, or hang your helpless soul upon God!
- a. I'll take my chances with God!

### For Further Study

1. For insights into how Christ dealt with doubt—in the person of His disciple, "doubting Thomas," see:
- a. DA 808.
  - b. Roger W. Coon, "Called to Testify," *Adventist Review*, April 13, 1995, pp. 8-10.