

A True Prophet? . . .
How Early Sabbath-Keeping
Adventists Accepted
Ellen G. White's Prophetic Gift
(1844-1872)

by Theodore N. Levterov

Introduction

- Part 1: 1844-1850 (Accepting EGW)
 - 19 C. Contextual Religious background.
 - Early Attitudes of Sabbath-keeping Adventist towards prophetic manifestation.
 - Early acceptance of EGW.

Introduction

- Part 2: 1851-1862: (Defending EGW)
 - Developing a stronger Biblical foundation for the belief in the gift of prophecy.
 - Questions and Controversies

Introduction

- Part 3: 1863-1872: (Affirming EGW)
 - Affirmation of EGW's prophetic gift
 - The prophetic gift – became a part of of SDA teachings.

I. Accepting the Prophetic Gift: 1844-1850

- EGW's first vision: Dec. 1844.
- Most Millerites – skeptical towards visions.
- Sabbath-keeping Adventists – gradually accepted EGW's claims.
- WHY?

Helpful Perspectives for Acceptance of Ellen White's Prophetic Gift:

- A) The 19 C. religious climate in America:
 - Opened to charismatic and visionary manifestations.
 - True conversion – was associated with supernatural encounters / intense emotionalism.
 - Appearance of prophets / visionaries

Nathan O. Hatch:

- *“Scores of preachers’ journals, from Methodists and Baptists, from north and south, from white and black, indicated a ready acceptance to consider dreams and visions as inspired by God, normal manifestations of divine guidance and instruction.”*

The Democratization of American Christianity, 10.

Peter Cartwright:

- *“My voice was strong and clear, and my preaching was more of an exhortation and encouragement than anything else. My text was, “The gates of hell shall not prevail.” In about thirty minutes the power of God fell on the congregation in such a manner as is seldom seen; the people fell in every direction, right and left, front and rear. It was supposed that not less than three hundred fell like dead men in mighty battle Our meeting lasted all night, and Monday and Monday night; and when we closed on Tuesday, there were two hundred who had professed religion, and about that number joined the Church.”*

Helpful Perspectives for Acceptance of Ellen White's Prophetic Gift:

- A) The 19 C. religious climate in America:
 - Opened to charismatic and visionary manifestations.
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Helpful Perspectives . . .

- B) Christian traditions of the early founders of the SDA:
 - Ellen White – Methodist tradition.
 - Camp meetings and emotional experiences.
 - James White and Joseph Bates – Christian Connection tradition.
 - William Kinkade (b. 1783)
 - At the center of the NT – was the doctrine of Spiritual Gifts.
 - Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts until the end of time.

William Kinkade:

- *“To say God caused these gifts to cease, is the same as to say, God has abolished the order of the New Testament church. . . . To divest the church of all these spiritual gifts, would be to take from the body of Christ the senses of hearing, smelling, seeing, &c.”*

The Bible Doctrine of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Sprit, Atonement, Faith, and Election, 335.

Helpful Perspectives. . .

- C) The Millerite Attitude:
- It was somewhat “complex.”
 - i) Millerite leadership – rejected charismatic manifestation and visionary claims.
 - Reaction – against fanaticism.
 - See: *Morning Watch*, May 15, 1845, 158.

Helpful Perspectives. . .

- C) The Millerite Attitude:
- It was somewhat “complex.”
 - Millerite leadership – rejected charismatic manifestation and visionary claims.
 - Millerite worships – open to such manifestations.
 - The existence of Millerite visionaries.
 - Ex: William E. Foy
 - Ex: Trial of Israel Dammon
 - Ex: Samuel S. Snow – the “new Elijah”

Millerite Resolution:

- Adventist Conference (in New York, May 1845):
- *“We have no confidence in any new messages, visions, dreams, tongues, miracles, extraordinary gifts, revelations, impressions, discerning of spirits, or teachings &c. &c. not in accordance with the unadulterated word of God.”*

Morning Watch, May 15, 1845, 158.

It is – in this CONTEXT that:

- Ellen White claimed prophetic manifestations.

- Sabbath keeping Adventists had to defend her gift as genuine.

What was the purpose of the initial arguments?

- A) To establish the Biblical authority of EGW's prophetic gift.
- B) To distinguish her gift from what they considered “false prophets,” Spiritualizers, and other false prophetic claims.
- By 1850s – they developed **four Biblical argumentations.**

Initial Arguments:

- 1) Biblical Support for the modern display of the gift of prophecy:
 - James White, “Letter from Bro. White,” *Day-Star*, Sept. 6, 1845, 17.
 - *“Bible warrants us in looking for visions.”*
 - Joseph Bates, *A Seal of the Living God* (1849), 27-28.
 - *“no faith in visions” leads to “no faith in the Bible.”*

Initial Arguments:

- 2) The “last days” (eschaton):
- Acts 2:17-20 cf. Joel 2:28-30
 - The gift of prophecy – was to be “visible” in the last days.
- This became one of the most used arguments to defend EGW.
- Her gift -- a “sign” of God’s people.

Initial Arguments:

- 3) The positive influence of Ellen White's visions among believers ("the good fruits"):
 - Based on personal experiences with the prophetic gift of Ellen White.
 - Ex: Joseph Bates
 - The "unifying power" of the visions.
 - Ex: Early Sabbath Conferences

Initial Arguments:

- 4) Existence of Counterfeit Prophets:
 - The existence of “false prophets” did not negate, but only confirmed -- the existence of “true ones.”
 - The question for the Sabbath-keeping Adventists was not whether “modern” prophets existed . . . But how to distinguish between “true” and “false” displays.

Summary:

Accepting EGW's Gift (1844-1850)

Initial Arguments:

- 1) Biblical validity
- 2) “Last Days” manifestation of the Holy Spirit
- 3) Bringing “positive fruits”
- 4) Differentiating EGW (true manifestation) from counterfeit prophets.

II. Defending the Prophetic Gift, 1851-1862

CONTEXT:

- Internal controversies
- The appearance of the first offshoots:
 - “Messenger Party” (H. S. Case and C. P. Russell)
 - “Age to Come” (J. M. Stephenson and D. P. Hall)
- First Periodical against Ellen White’s gift –
 - *Messenger of Truth*

Critical objections:

- 1) Sabbath-keepers – had “another rule of faith.”
- 2) Rev. 12:17 – “*testimony of Jesus*” -- had nothing to do with EGW.
- 3) The visions – were made “a test” of fellowship.
- 4) EGW – was from the “wrong gender” to claim visions.

Sabbatarian Responses:

- 1) The “Bible alone” principle:
 - Did not offer new arguments. BUT:
 - Clarified the relationship between the Bible and EGW’s prophetic gift.
- See: James White, “The Gifts of the Gospel Church”, *RH*, Apr. 21, 1851, 70.

- *“The gifts of the Spirit should all have their proper places. The Bible is an everlasting rock. It is our rule of faith and practice. . . . Every Christian is therefore in duty bound to take the Bible as a perfect rule of faith and duty. He should pray fervently to be aided by the Holy Spirit in searching the Scriptures for the whole truth, and for his whole duty. He is not at liberty to turn from them to learn his duty through any of the gifts. . . .*

- We say that the very moment he does [that], he *places the gifts in a wrong place*, and *takes an extremely dangerous position*. The Word should be in front, and the eye of the church should be placed upon it, as the rule to walk by, and the fountain of wisdom from which to learn duty in “all good works.” But if a portion of the church err from the truths of the Bible, and become weak, and sickly, and the flock become scattered, so that it seems necessary for God to employ the gifts of the Spirit to correct, revive and heal the erring, we should let him work.” ***

Ellen G. White, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views* (1851)

- *“I recommend to you, dear reader, the word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the ‘LAST DAYS;’ not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of his people, and to correct those who err from bible truth.”* (64)

... 1) The “Bible alone” Principle .

- A decision, not to publish EGW in the *Review and Herald*
- *Review and Herald. . . .Extra (1851)*
 - Only one issues
 - The appearance of EGW’s first autobiographical books and the beginning of the *Testimonies*.
 - *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White (1851).*
 - *Supplement to the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White (1854)*
 - *Testimonies for the Church (1855)*

Sabbatarian Responses:

- 2) Interpretation of Rev. 12:17
 - Rev. 12:17 – must be interpreted in the light of Rev. 19:10
 - the “testimony of Jesus” is the “Spirit of Prophecy”
- Identifying mark of the “remnant” people of God.

Sabbatarian Responses:

- 3) A “test” of fellowship
- Few nuances on the “test” question:
 - Not a “test” of fellowship
 - A “test” – only for those who accept EGW.
 - A belief in the doctrine of “spiritual gifts” – a test.
- Willingness – to show tolerance towards believers.

Sabbatarian Responses:

- 4) The “gender” of Ellen White
- The giving of the “gifts” – did not depend on one’s gender.
- 1 Cor. 14: 34-35 – “*Let your women keep silence in the church . . .*” (see next slide)
- Examples of female prophetesses in the Bible.

S. C. Welcome, “Shall the Women Keep Silence in the Churches,” *RH*, Feb. 23, 1860, 110.

- *“We are informed on the authority of divine revelation that male and female are one in Christ Jesus; that in the relation in which they both stand to him, the distinction is as completely broken down as between Jew and Gentile, bond and free. . . . Then let no stumbling-block be thrown in their [female] way, but let them fill the place that God calls them to fill, let them not be bound down to silence by church rules, but let their tongues speak forth the praises of God, and let them point sinners to the Lamb of God, and grieve not the holy Spirit by silence in the congregation.” ****

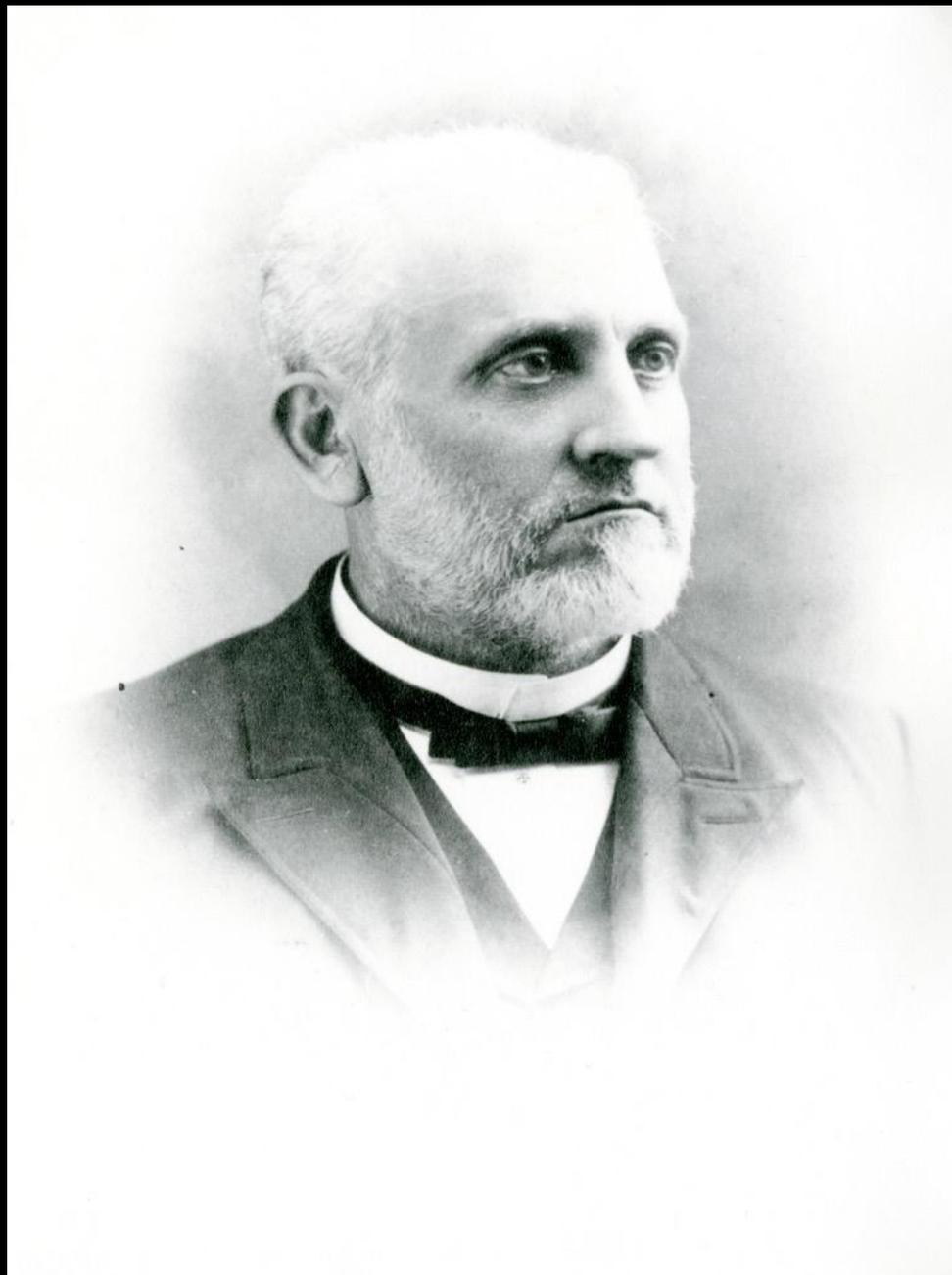
Summary: Defending the Gift (1851-1862)

- Sabbatarians – were forced to deal with “internal controversies” related to EGW’s prophetic gift.
- By the 1860s – the Sabbath-keeping Adventists began to have a well formulated Biblical and theological position on the prophetic gift of Ellen White.

III. Affirming the Prophetic Gift, 1863-1872

CONTEXT:

- Internal Ministerial Crisis over the Gift of Prophecy:
 - B. F. Snook and W. H. Brinkerhoff
 - The first book against EGW: *The Visions of E. G. White, Not of God* (1866)
- External Critics:
 - William Sheldon
 - Miles Grant





THE
VISIONS
OF
E. G. WHITE,
NOT OF GOD.

BY
B. F. SNOOK & WM. H. BRINKERHOFF.

"Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted-up."—Matt. 15:13.

CEDAR RAPIDS:
CEDAR VALLEY TIME & JOB PRINT.
1866.

ADVENTIST
HERITAGE CENTER
James White Library
ANDREWS UNIVERSITY

June 12, 1866

Ch. W. White

Critical objections:

- Most of the arguments – repetitive.
- Two new nuances:
 - 1) The “suppression” question of EGW’s earliest writings.
 - Because of conflicts with Biblical teachings.
 - Doctrinal inconsistencies in her own writings.
 - EGW changed her mind.
 - 2) Nothing “supernatural” about EGW visions.

SDA Responses:

- 1) The issue of “suppression”
- Part of EGW writings were not republished.
- YES, BUT:
 - It had nothing to do with theology / a change of mind.
 - Practical reasons (original circumstances)
 - Stylistic reasons (grammar / language)

SDA Responses:

- Uriah Smith's series of articles in the *Review*:
 - “The Visions—Objections Answered.” (1866)
- Three major points:
 - Making the writings – “suitable” for the general readership.
 - Look at the – “general principles” of her writings.
 - The meaning of the vision(s) – was not changed.

Uriah Smith:

- *Portions which are claimed to have been suppressed are simply some things which related to particular and local circumstances, and having accomplished their object, have not been inserted when that which is of general interest has been re-published.*

“The Visions – Objections Answered,” *RH*, July 31, 1866, 66.

SDA Responses:

- 1) The issue of “suppression”
- A decision – to republish Ellen White’s earlier writings.
- Examples:
 - *Life Sketches* (1880)
 - *Early Writings* (1882)

SDA Responses:

- 2) The “supernatural” argument
- Used for the first time in the 1860s:
 - EGW’s visions – could not be controlled by anybody.
 - Her visions – were witnessed by many people.
 - Revelations of “things” (facts) – unknown to her.
- Began to publish personal “testimonies” of people in the *Review and Herald*.

SDA Responses:

- EGW's supernatural conditions while in vision:
 - Utterly unconscious of things around her
 - Did not breath
 - Her muscles became “rigid”
 - Her eyes were open
 - She was -- blinded (for a while) as she came out of visions (but her eyesight was not “impaired.”)
 - Etc.

Affirming the Prophetic Gift through PUBLICATIONS:

- 1868 – the Uriah Smith’s book:
 - *The Visions of Mrs. E. G. White: A Manifestation of Spiritual Gifts According to the Scripture*
 - An official response to Snook’s and Brinkerhoff’s book.
- The first “apologetic” work – defending EGW’s prophetic gift.

Affirming the Prophetic Gift through PUBLICATIONS:

- Official General Conference Resolutions
 - Affirming the gift of prophecy of EGW.
- Example: *RH*, Feb. 14, 1871, 68.
 - (See: Next Slide)

“Business Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH*, Feb. 14, 1871, 68.

- “*Resolved*, That we re-affirm our abiding confidence in the Testimonies of Sr. White to the church, as the teaching of the Spirit of God, and that we have each year continual and growing evidence that they are such.”

Affirming the Prophetic Gift through PUBLICATIONS:

- 1872 – the first SDA doctrinal statement of beliefs:
 - *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists*
- Point 16: “Spiritual Gifts”. →

A DECLARATION
— OF —
THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES
OF THE
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS.

IN presenting to the public this synopsis of our faith, we wish to have it distinctly understood that we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline, aside from the Bible. We do not put forth this as having any authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them, as a system of faith, but is a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them. We often find it necessary to meet inquiries on this subject, and sometimes to correct false statements circulated against us, and to remove erroneous impressions which have obtained with those who have not had an opportunity to become acquainted with our faith and practice. Our only object is to meet this necessity.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we desire simply that our position shall be understood; and we are the more solicitous for this because there are many who call themselves Adventists, who hold views with which we can have no sympathy, some of which, we think, are subversive of the plainest

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—XV—

That, as all have violated the law of God, and cannot of themselves render obedience to his just requirements, we are dependent on Christ, first, for justification from our past offenses, and, secondly, for grace whereby to render acceptable obedience to his holy law in time to come.

—XVI—

That the Spirit of God was promised to manifest itself in the church through certain gifts, enumerated especially in 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4; that these gifts are not designed to supersede, or take the place of, the Bible, which is sufficient to make us wise unto salvation, any more than the Bible can take the place of the Holy Spirit; that in specifying the various channels of its operation, that Spirit has simply made provision for its own existence and presence with the people of God to the end of time, to lead to an understanding of that word which it had inspired, to convince of sin, and work a transformation in the heart and life; and that those who deny to the Spirit its place and operation do plainly deny that part of the Bible which assigns to it this work and position.

—XVII—

That God, in accordance with his uniform dealings with the race, sends forth a proclamation of the approach of the second advent of Christ; that this work is symbolized by the three messages.

of Rev. 14, the last one bringing to view the work of reform on the law of God, that his people may acquire a complete readiness for that event.

—XVIII—

That the time of the cleansing of the sanctuary (see proposition X), synchronizing with the time of the proclamation of the third message, is a time of investigative judgment, first, with reference to the dead, and, at the close of probation, with reference to the living, to determine who of the myriads now sleeping in the dust of the earth are worthy of a part in the first resurrection, and who of its living multitudes are worthy of translation—points which must be determined before the Lord appears.

—XIX—

That the grave, whither we all tend, expressed by the Hebrew *sheol* and the Greek *hades*, is a place of darkness in which there is no work, device, wisdom, or knowledge. Eccl. 9: 10.

—XX—

That the state to which we are reduced by death is one of silence, inactivity, and entire unconsciousness. Ps. 146: 4; Eccl. 9: 5, 6; Dan. 12: 2, &c.

—XXI—

That out of this prison house of the grave, mankind are to be brought by a bodily resurrec-

Point 16:

- “That the Spirit of God was promised to manifest itself in the church through certain gifts, enumerated especially in 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4; that *these gifts are not designed to supersede, or take the place of the Bible,* which is sufficient to make us wise unto salvation, any more than the Bible can take the place of the Holy Spirit; that in specifying the various channels of its operation . . .

Point 16:

- that *Spirit has simply made provision for its own existence and presence with the people of God to the end of time, to lead to an understanding of that word which it had inspired, to convince of sin, and work a transformation in the heart and life; and that those who deny to the Spirit its place and operation, do plainly deny that part of the Bible which assigns to it his work and position.”*

Summary:

Affirming the Gift (1863-1872)

- Most arguments repetitive.
- SDA had to answer two new nuances:
 - Suppression
 - Supernatural
- The objections did not diminish but affirmed the SDA belief in EGW's prophetic gift.
- The prophetic gift – became a part of the SDA statement of belief and an unique “mark” of the denomination.

Summary:

- ACCEPTING the Prophetic Gift (1844-1850)
- DEFENDING the Prophetic Gift (1851-1862)
- AFFIRMING the Prophetic Gift (1863-1872)

General Conclusions:

- 1) SDA belief in EGW's prophetic gift – is based on the Bible and its teachings:
 - Biblical arguments to objections.
 - It became – an “identifying mark” of the end-time people of God.
 - It became a part of the doctrinal statement of beliefs.

General Conclusions:

- 2) Belief in Ellen White's gift is not only based on evidence, but also on "personal experience" with the gift.
 - Believers were given time and "space" to examine, understand, and appreciated the gift of prophecy.
 - Patience and tolerance.
 - Belief in the Gift of Prophecy – cannot be "imposed" but must be "experienced."

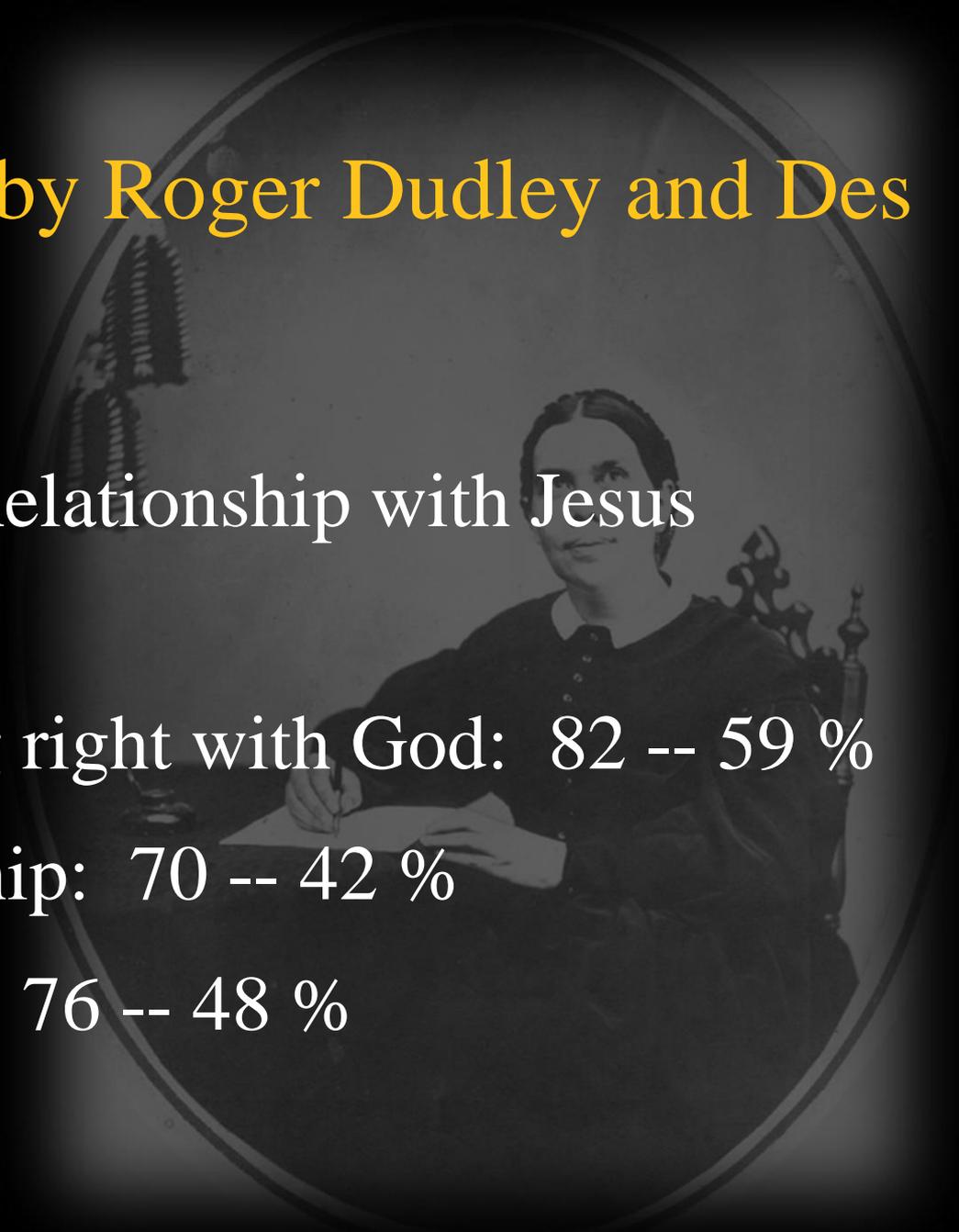
General Conclusions:

- 3) Discussion of EGW's prophetic gift – has helped the church to establish other important theological principles and put the doctrine of the gift of prophecy into a balanced perspective within our overall theology.
 - Affirmed the “Sola Scriptura” principle.
 - Developed a comprehensive defense of the modern display of the gift of prophecy
 - Pointed out – the end-time significance of the “prophetic gift” for the “remnant” people of God.
 - Clarified the relationship between the Bible and the gifts.
 - Rejected EGW's gift as a source for SDA teachings (beliefs).

What is it for YOU?

1985 – SURVEY (by Roger Dudley and Des Cummings, Jr.):

- Have an intimate Relationship with Jesus Christ: 85 -- 59 %
- Assurance of being right with God: 82 -- 59 %
- Daily family worship: 70 -- 42 %
- Doing Witnessing: 76 -- 48 %



- *“Seldom does a research study find the evidence so heavily weighted toward one conclusion. In the church growth survey, on every single item that deals with personal attitudes or practices, the member who regularly studies Ellen White’s books tends to rank higher than does the member who reads them only occasionally or never. . . . Certainly the implication is that the regular reading of Ellen White’s material does make a positive difference in Christian life and witness.”*

What is it for YOU?

- God has given the SDA Church – an incredible gift.
- **EXPERIENCE THE GIFT – Personally.**

• QUESTIONS?

