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# **Major Themes in the Writings of Ellen G. White**

What Ellen White's writings are all about.

# Themes in the writings of Ellen White

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For this lecture I am indebted to George Knight's book *Meeting Ellen White* in which he discusses these themes (pp. 109-127).

# Themes in the writings of Ellen White

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While Ellen White was not a theologian, per se, her writings present many theological themes and ideas which expand on the biblical stories.

A theme represents an idea or concept that helps us understand her writings, her theology and her burden for individuals and the church.

# Themes in the writings of Ellen White

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Themes integrate various strands of Ellen White's thinking into a unified network of concepts.

They provide an interpretative framework for not only single documents or books, but for entire sectors of her writings (such as health, education, family living).

# **Themes in the writings of Ellen White**

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Love of God

Great Controversy

Jesus, the Cross, and Salvation

Centrality of the Bible

Second Coming of Jesus

Third Angel's Message and Adventist Mission

Practical Christianity and Character

Development

# Love of God

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Perhaps the central and most comprehensive theme of the writings of Ellen White is that of the love of God.

This is a theme that she repeatedly mentions and discusses in her books.

# Love of God

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The phrase “God is love” appears as

the first three words of  
*Patriarchs and Prophets*

and

the last three words of  
*The Great Controversy*.

# Love of God

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In Ellen White's writings,  
God's love is the central point of the  
great struggle between good and  
evil.

“God is love” is the phrase that  
provides the context for her telling of  
the great controversy story.



# Love of God

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The first chapter of *Steps to Christ* begins with the words:

“Nature and revelation alike  
testify of God’s love.”

# Love of God

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“The world, though fallen, is not all sorrow and misery. In nature itself are messages of hope and comfort. There are flowers upon the thistles, and the thorns are covered with roses. ‘God is love’ is written upon every opening bud, upon every spire of springing grass.” (Steps to Christ, pp. 9-10)

# Love of God

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Yet, Ellen White points out, that the things of nature in a world of sin “but imperfectly represent His love.”

The supreme and clearest illustration of God’s love for us is God sending Jesus to save us from our sins (SC 10-13).

# Love of God

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In the first chapter of the *Desire of Ages* she points out that Jesus “came to reveal the light of God’s love” (DA 19).

# Love of God

“Both the redeemed and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song. It will be seen that the glory shining in the face of Jesus is the glory of self-sacrificing love. In the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which "seeketh not her own" has its source in the heart of God; and that in the meek and lowly One is manifested the character of Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto.” (DA 19-20)

# Love of God

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On the last page of the *Desire of Ages*, her conclusion is that through Christ “love has conquered” (DA 835).

# Love of God

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“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.” (GC 678)

# The Great Controversy

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The themes of the love of God and the Great Controversy are closely interconnected.

Mrs. White emphasizes repeatedly that the focal point of the Great Controversy is Satan's aim to misrepresent the loving character of God.



# The Great Controversy

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“Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice,--one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor.

He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgments upon them. It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men. The Son of God came from heaven to make manifest the Father.” (Steps to

Christ, p. 11)

# **The Great Controversy**

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Satan's aim is also to misrepresent  
God's law.

In Ellen White's thought the  
character of God and law of God  
are not two elements but one.

# The Great Controversy

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“Satan represents God’s law of love as a law of selfishness. He declares that it is impossible for us to obey its precepts.”

(Desire of Ages, p. 24)

“From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan’s purpose to overthrow the law of God.”

(Great Controversy, p. 582)

# The Great Controversy

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In the great controversy, God fights against this misrepresentation.

“The history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God's unchanging love.” (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 33)

# The Great Controversy

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God's demonstration of his love in the ongoing conflict with Satan forms the focus of the Conflict of the Ages Series.

This theme provides the theological framework that gives direction and context to the rest of her writings.

# The Great Controversy

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“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.” (The Great Controversy, p. 678)

# Jesus, the Cross, and Salvation

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God's foremost demonstration of his love in the great controversy was his sending Jesus to redeem humanity.

“It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men.” (Steps to Christ, p. 11)

# Jesus, the Cross, and Salvation

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“Through Christ's redeeming work the government of God stands justified. The Omnipotent One is made known as the God of love. Satan's charges are refuted, and his character unveiled.” (Desire of Ages, p. 26)



# Jesus, the Cross, and Salvation

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For Ellen White Jesus was not only the victorious Redeemer over the forces of evil, he is a very personal friend to her, and the Savior who died on the cross for each individual human being.

# Jesus, the Cross, and Salvation

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“Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With His stripes we are healed’.” (Desire of Ages, p. 25)

# Jesus, the Cross, and Salvation

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“Christ crucified for our sins, Christ risen from the dead, Christ ascended on high, is the science of salvation that we are to learn and to teach.”

(Testimonies 8:287)

# Jesus, the Cross, and Salvation

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“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. This is to be the foundation of every discourse given by our ministers.” (Gospel Workers, p. 315)

# The centrality of the Bible

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Another important theme in Ellen White's writings is the Bible, the written Word of God.

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)

# The centrality of the Bible

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“In His word, 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. ‘Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work’.” (Great Controversy, p. vii)

# The centrality of the Bible

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“Search the Scriptures carefully to see what is true. . . . The truth can lose nothing by close investigation. Let the Word of God speak for itself, let it be its own interpreter. Our people, individually, must understand Bible truth more thoroughly, for they certainly will be called before councils; they will be criticized by keen and critical minds. It is one thing to give assent to the truth, and another thing, through close examination as Bible students, to know what is truth.

# The centrality of the Bible

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“Many, many will be lost because they have not studied their Bibles upon their knees, with earnest prayer to God that the entrance of the Word of God might give light to their understanding. . . . The

Word of God is the great detector of error; to it we believe everything must be brought. The Bible must be our standard for every doctrine and practice. . . .



# The centrality of the Bible

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“We are to receive no one’s opinion without comparing it with the Scriptures. Here is divine authority, which is supreme in matters of faith. It is the word of the living God that is to decide all controversies.” (1888 Materials 38-40, 44, 45, written August 5, 1888 to “Brethren Who Shall Assemble in General Conference”)

# **The Second Coming of Christ**

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The Second Coming of Jesus was of central importance to Ellen White from the time of her conversion in the Millerite experience in the 1840s.

The reality of the nearness of the Advent dominated her life and shaped her writing career.

# The Second Coming of Christ

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“The Second Coming is a focal point of truth in the Bible, it is the climax of salvation in Christ, it signals the beginning of the end of the great controversy between good and evil, it is a supreme expression of God’s love, it is the point of the three angel’s messages, and it provides an incentive for Christian living. The Second Coming left no part of Ellen White’s thinking unaffected.” (George

Knight, *Meeting Ellen White*, pp. 117-118)

# The Second Coming of Christ

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“The truths of prophecy are bound up together, and as we study them, they form a beautiful cluster of practical Christian truth. All the discourses that we give are plainly to reveal that we are waiting, working, and praying for the coming of the Son of God. His coming is our hope. This hope is to be bound up with all our words and works, with all our associations and relationships.” (Letter 150, 1902 in Ev 220)

# The Second Coming of Christ

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Some of Ellen White's most beautiful and inspiring writing was in connection with the events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ and life on the new earth.

*The Great Controversy*

Chapter 40: "God's People Delivered"

Chapter 42: "The Controversy Ended"

# **The Third Angel's Message and Adventist Mission**

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“In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import--the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages.

# The Third Angel's Message and Adventist Mission

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“There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.

The most solemn truths ever entrusted to mortals have been given us to proclaim to the world. The proclamation of these truths is to be our work. The world is to be warned, and God's people are to be true to the trust committed to them.” (Testimonies, vol. 9, p.10)

# **The Third Angel's Message and Adventist Mission**

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The first angel's message is a call for humanity to worship God and to prepare for the arrival of God's judgment.

The second angel's message announces the fall of Babylon and proclaims that all human systems of salvation are not valid in the eyes of God.



# The Third Angel's Message and Adventist Mission

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“When Christ entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary to perform the closing work of the atonement, He committed to His servants the last message of mercy to be given to the world. Such is the warning of the third angel of Revelation 14. Immediately following its proclamation, the Son of man is seen by the prophet coming in glory to reap the harvest of the earth.” (Story of Redemption, p. 379)

# **The Third Angel's Message and Adventist Mission**

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Truths of the Third Angel's Message to be proclaimed to the world:

1. Salvation by faith in Christ
2. Obedience to the commandments of God
3. Observance of the Sabbath as the seal of God
4. The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan

# **The Third Angel's Message and Adventist Mission**

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Having the faith of Jesus means:

1. Trusting in Jesus as our sin-pardoning  
**Savior** (Ms 24, 1888 in 1888 Materials, p. 217)
2. Believing in the teachings of Jesus as  
**found in the Bible** (1Bio 404)

# **The Third Angel's Message and Adventist Mission**

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It is easy to see how Ellen White's extensive writings on righteousness by faith, the law of God, the Sabbath, the great controversy, and other topics related to the third angel's message.

But what is often overlooked is that her writings on education, health, publishing, and gospel ministry are also connected to the third angel's message.

# **The Third Angel's Message and Adventist Mission**

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Adventist education is to train young people to spread the third angel's message

The Adventist health message is to provide people with better health so that they can more adequately preach this message. Health institutions are witnesses to the truth.

The publishing and gospel ministries are to spread the last message to a dying world.

# **Practical Christianity and the Development of Christian Character**

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For Ellen White Christianity affects every part of a person's life. True Christianity is not something that touches people only when they are in church but it transforms people from the inside out.

# **Practical Christianity and the Development of Christian Character**

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Christianity changes the heart and that inner change, if it is genuine, carries over into every aspect of life: family relationships, school, work, and recreation.

# **Practical Christianity and the Development of Christian Character**

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Jesus is the Christian's example to follow.

Jesus came to earth not only to die for us, but “to give us an example of obedience.” Christ “revealed a character the opposite of the character of Satan.”

(Desire of Ages, pp. 24, 25)



# Practical Christianity and the Development of Christian Character

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“Wherever there is union with Christ there is love.

Whatever other fruits we may bear, if love be missing, they profit nothing. Love to God and our neighbor is the very essence of our religion. No one can love Christ and not love His children. When we are united to Christ, we have the mind of Christ.

Purity and love shine forth in the character, meekness and truth control the life. The very expression of the countenance is changed. 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, vol. 1, p. 337)

# **Practical Christianity and the Development of Christian Character**

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To Ellen White everything matters in the Christian life. Every decision we make may have an impact upon our spiritual life or that of someone else. One small decision may make a big difference in the scheme of eternity.

# **Practical Christianity and the Development of Christian Character**

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Hence, Ellen White discusses many difficult subjects and sometimes her counsels seem harsh and demanding.

Abandoning harmful habits and destructive ways of relating to others.

Discarding activities and attitudes that do not uplift one's spiritual life.

# **Practical Christianity and the Development of Christian Character**

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What matters most in her writings on practical Christianity is that harmful, sinful, needless habits and ways of life be replaced with a life lived like Jesus did.

“What would Jesus do and have me do?”  
is certainly a theme in her writings.

# **Practical Christianity and the Development of Christian Character**

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Ellen White believed that what Jesus wants to do most is to reproduce himself in the hearts of Christians, and that those who have faith in him will put away the self-centered life of Satan's kingdom for the loving service of God and others.

# **Practical Christianity and the Development of Christian Character**

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“Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.” (Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 69)

# Full Circle

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“The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them. The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works--in words of truth and deeds of holiness.” (Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 415-416)