

THAT IS THE LANGUAGE OF THE SPIRIT: "...the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave Themselves..."

By

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Background

Consider this quote from Ellen G. White (EGW) from the Counsels on Health.

"The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave Themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption. In order fully to carry out this plan, it was decided that Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, should give Himself an offering for sin. What line can measure the depth of this love? God would make it impossible for man to say that He could have done more. With Christ He gave all the resources of heaven, that nothing might be wanting in the plan for man's uplifting. Here is love—the contemplation of which should fill the soul with inexpressible gratitude! Oh, what love, what matchless love! The contemplation of this love will cleanse the soul from all selfishness. It will lead the disciple to deny self, take up the cross, and follow the Redeemer." {CH 222.2, E. G. White}

Many faithful SDAs hear this statement (and other such statements from EGW (three highest powers, three dignitaries, etc)) as saying, "three CO-EQUAL persons of the godhead". Many would say, 'you see, the three sat down and agreed, so they are three co-equal persons'. We will talk of the meaning of godhead another time. For now, let us focus on why and how the Spirit is often referred to as an independent entity from the Father and the Son.

Firstly, we should refrain from interpretation by imagination. When one reads the words "gave themselves" they can begin to imagine 'a committee of' three individuals discussing to make a decision about the salvation of lost souls. But that is not given anywhere in the Bible. EGW says she supports everything she says with the a "Thus saith the Lord".

"The testimonies of Sister White should not be carried to the front. God's Word is the unerring standard. The Testimonies are not to take the place of the Word. ... **Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God.**" Letter 12, 1890, E.G. White (Ev 256). (emphasis added)

"Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand **a plain** "Thus saith the Lord" in its support." {4SP 413, E.G. White} (emphasis added)

"...In my books, the truth is stated, **barricaded by a "Thus saith the Lord."** ...)—Letter 90, 1906 E.G. White. {CM 126.2} (emphasis added)

We should not take the testimonies as an addition to the Bible but as an exposition of the Bible. We should be able to close the testimonies and prove the same points of the testimonies from the Bible alone. When we try that on this quotation, we cannot see in the Bible a "Thus saith the Lord, the three powers sat down to discuss what to do". We always see a "Thus saith the Lord, One God, the Father anointed His Son with His (the Father's) Spirit (Isaiah 48:16; 61:1; Luke 4:18; John 20:21) then

sent His Son to the world for our salvation.” In fact, this very quotation above tells us that it was God, the Father of the Son of God, who gave Christ, not the godhead committee. The statement further says “it was decided” not ‘they decided’. The statement also tells us that the one who was sent is the **only-begotten** Son **OF GOD**. He is not the only-begotten Son of the godhead, but of God. The one to whom the decision to send Christ is accounted is the Father of the Son of God, and his love is extolled who gave all the resources of heaven in His Son.

You can read all the Bible, there is only one who gave us Christ, that’s the One God, the Father. The plain “Thus saith the Lord is that “The Spirit was in Christ, both Christ and the Spirit sent by the Father”. The Spirit did not give us Christ. Rather the One God Almighty, the Father promised and gave both His only-begotten Son of God and His Spirit of God. We will come back to this point, i.e. proving EGW by the Bible alone, at the end of this writing.

In this study, we want to consider the language used when referring to a person relative to the spirit of that person. After that, we will demonstrate that EGW in the above statement was quoting Isaiah chapter 48 and that this chapter is the great commission itself, i.e. Matthew 29:18:20. This is important to demonstrate that the above statement can be found in the Bible, just as it reads.

Investigating the language

Now, let us look for evidence of how the spirit is spoken of in the Bible, i.e. where a person is active separately with his spirit at the same time, yet not two different persons, but only one person with his spirit. Come with me to Psalms 77:3 and 6.

- Psalms 77:3 I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit (*H7307-ruach*) was overwhelmed.

Notice that both David and his spirit were troubled/overwhelmed. In other words, “David and his spirit were troubled” or “David and the spirit of David were troubled”. Notice the similarity of language referring to David and “my spirit” both in the same experiences simultaneously. Consider this next work showing the same approach.

- Psalms 77:6 I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit (*H7307-ruach*) made diligent search.

Notice again the language of simultaneous experience between David and “my spirit” (his spirit). David calls to remembrance while his spirit is making diligent search. Both David and his spirit are trying to remember. In other words, we can see clearly that “David and his spirit were making diligent search or remembering”. It can also be said “David and the spirit of David were making diligent search or remembering”. Despite the language that speaks of the spirit of David having its own experience at the same time as David, Adventist doctrine would never say the spirit of David is an entity equal to and completely independent of David. Why not, because we understand the language by which the spirit is referred to, because of the words “my spirit”, i.e. a spirit belonging to David.

This language, where the person and the spirit he possesses are both doing the same thing at the same time, and spoken of as if they are separate independent entities, in communion with each other, is throughout scripture. You will see it in the following accounts:

- Jacob – his spirit (*H7307-ruach*) revived (Genesis 45:27). Jacob and his spirit (the spirit of Jacob) were revived.

- Samson – his spirit (*H7307-ruach*) came again (Judges 15:19). The spirit of Samson came back to him, i.e. Samson regained composure after his extreme hunger was satisfied by food.
- Elijah – his spirit (*H7307-ruach*) was placed on Elisha (2 Kings 2:9, did Elijah go without a spirit, having left it with Elisha, and how come Elijah ended up with two portions of Elijah's spirit). Elijah granted a double portion of his spirit to Elisha.
- Job – his spirit (*H7307-ruach*) was overwhelmed/troubled (Job 21:4). Job and his spirit (the spirit of Job) were both troubled.
- Daniel – his spirit (the spirit of Daniel) (*H7307-ruach*) was grieved while Daniel himself was troubled by his visions (Daniel 7:15). Thus Daniel and his spirit were both troubled.
- Jesus – sighed in his spirit (Mark 8:12). Thus Jesus and his spirit (*G4151-pneuma*) both sighed.

In all these examples we see this. That a spirit (*H7307-ruach* or *G4151-pneuma*) is spoken of both as possessed by a person (his spirit, my spirit) and as if independent of the person, doing its own searching, grieving, sighing and troubling, etc. Yet in all that, we never say the spirit of a person is a second independent part co-equal to the person who possesses that spirit, so that the two make up another composite being. Why then is it surprising that EGW uses the same language? Why would the same language when used by EGW be interpreted differently to mean that the Spirit of the Father, that the Father shares with His only-begotten Son of God (the Spirit of Christ) is independent of and co-equal to them both?

Here is another example.

- Ecclesiastes 1:16 I communed with mine own heart...

So, according to that logic, that an entity belonging to a person being spoken of as having independent personal characteristics is another co-equal person, then Solomon's heart which he communed with is another person co-equal to Solomon. We know it is not so, for we know what it means that the heart is his own heart.

- Nehemiah 5:7 Then I consulted with myself...

With the same line of reasoning, how did Nehemiah consult himself? It takes at least two people to consult each other. How many people is Nehemiah that he may consult someone in himself? We know again that to talk to self does not make one existentially two persons.

The point is, if we use the language by which the spirit is always discussed, we will see that it is not a surprise that EGW spoke of the Spirit of God (which is His Spirit, belonging to him) as a separate entity. That does not nullify the established fact that the Spirit is OF God, the Father, belonging to Him, given by Him to His ONLY-BEGOTTEN Son of God, and through the only-begotten Son to the believers. There is no conflict there, nor any need to make the Spirit another individual co-equal to One God, the Father, or His Son. Hence, EGW never in her writings nullified the belongingness of the Son and the Spirit to the Father as trinitarian and tri-theistic nominal Adventists do. In fact, she affirms that over and over, that the ONLY-BEGOTTEN Son and the Spirit are OF God, the Father.

We therefore affirm EGW's use of THE LANGUAGE OF THE SPIRIT as it is in the Bible. We affirm that in her phrases such as the "three highest powers", the "three heavenly dignitaries" and others where the three (the Father, the Son of God and the Spirit of God) are mentioned together in the same mission EGW is simply using the language by which the spirit is spoken of. In that is not any co-equality whether explicitly stated or implied.

Isaiah 48 in EGW's words.

Consider Isaiah 48:16.

Isaiah 48:16b ...and now the Lord GOD, and his Spirit, hath sent me.

Notice the language. The Lord God, and His Spirit sent the Son of God. How so?

Isaiah 61:1a The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek...

The Lord God anointed His Son with His (God's) Spirit before sending him. That is how the Spirit of God is involved in the sending of the Son of God. Not as a decider, but as the one by whom the One God, the Father, anoints his only-begotten Son. Hence, when read from different versions, Isaiah 48:16 sounds like this:

(ASV) ...and now the Lord Jehovah hath sent me, and his Spirit.

(BBE) ...and now the Lord God has sent me, and given me his spirit.

(ESV) ...And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit.

Now, let's bring that EGW statement back again. This time we highlight some important elements of it. Can we prove that this statement by EGW is found as a "Thus saith the Lord" in the Bible? Yes we can. Notice.

"The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave Themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption. In order fully to carry out this plan, **it was decided that Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, should give Himself an offering for sin.** What line can measure the depth of this love? **God would make it impossible for man to say that He could have done more.** With Christ He gave all the resources of heaven, that nothing might be wanting in the plan for man's uplifting. *Here is love*—the contemplation of which should fill the soul with inexpressible gratitude! *Oh, what love, what matchless love!* The contemplation of this love will cleanse the soul from all selfishness. **It will lead the disciple to deny self, take up the cross, and follow the Redeemer.**" {CH 222.2}

Let us put this side by side with Isaiah 48, and with commentary.

	EGW statements	Isaiah 48 equivalent	Comment
1	The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race	Isaiah 48:9 For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off.	God was pitiful that he did not cut-off Israel just as much as Adam. That God is clearly identified in Isaiah 48:6 as one who says "I", "my" and "mine" indicating one person speaking, feeling pity for them. God, the Father is the Godhead, the only ULTIMATE source of divinity.
2	<i>the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave themselves</i>	...and now the Lord GOD, and his Spirit, hath sent me.	These are the three highest powers, the Father, the Son and the Spirit of God, according to EGW. But before we go speculating, notice this. These are not three CO-EQUAL highest powers. There is no equality mentioned here. Notice the following:

			<p>The Spirit belongs to God because the Son says “His Spirit”.</p> <p>God is the one who has sent because the Son says “hath [has] sent me”, that’s one person who sent. If two had sent the Son would say “have sent me”.</p>
3	<u>the working out of the plan of redemption</u>	<p>Isaiah 48:18 O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea:</p> <p>19 ...his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me.</p> <p>20 Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob.</p> <p>21 And they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out.</p>	<p>Notice the symbol of redemption from Babylon. There is represented the plan of redemption because “The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob.” (v20).</p> <p>The plan is in “hearkening to the commandments of God” (v18) and the result is “peace as a river” (v18).</p> <p>In v21, this plan of redemption is likened to the exodus from Egypt and the wilderness experience. In that experience God gave everything to sustain the children of Israel in the desert. In that desert, the rock that followed them was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Hence the plan of redemption is all about God, and what he does through His Son and by His Spirit.</p>
4	it was decided that Christ	<p>Isaiah 48:11 For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another.</p>	<p>Question is who decided? Before we speculate that it was a committee of co-equal persons called the Godhead, check point 6 below. The answer is given both by EGW and the Bible as to who decided. It was the Father, the One Almighty God.</p>
5	<u>the only-begotten Son of God, should give Himself an offering for sin</u>	<p>Isaiah 48:14...The LORD hath loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans.</p> <p>15 I, even I, have spoken; yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous.</p>	<p>The evidence of Isaiah 48 is of the one LOVED by God, one who will do God’s will in the enemy’s (Satan’s) camp, to be prosperous in his work of redemption of the human race. He will overcome Babylon, a symbol of the adversary, an oppressor of God’s people. With this evidence, EGW links Isaiah 48:16 to John 3:16 for she uses the phrase “only begotten Son of God” just as it is in John 3:16. She does not change this into a special/unique son, but only-begotten Son in simple English. Thus, as EGW says elsewhere, at that time, Christ was the Son of God when the decision was made by the Father to send Him into the world.</p> <p>"Christ was the only begotten Son of God, and lucifer, that glorious angel, got up a warfare over the matter, until he had to be thrust down to the</p>

			earth. {Ms86-1910 (August 21, 1910) par. 30}
6	God would make it impossible for man to say that He could have done more.	Isaiah 48:11 For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another...14 All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear; which among them hath declared these things? The LORD hath loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans. 15 I, even I, have spoken; yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous.	It was God, not some committee of persons called the Godhead, who made the complete unreserved provision for salvation. The God to whom the Son and the Spirit belongs decided. He loved His Son (v14), for His (God's) name sake and gave him glory (v11). The Son. Anointed by the Father's Spirit (v16) has the power to spoil Babylon (v14) and be prosperous (v15). With Christ success EGW observes that there is nothing God could have done for salvation of men that he did not do.
7	<i>With Christ He gave all the resources of heaven,</i>	Isaiah 48:21 And they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out.	A symbol of God's total providence is the time spent by the children of Israel in the wilderness. Everything was provided, clothes, water, food, health, covering of the pillar of cloud for shade by day and a pillar of fire for warmth by night. They lacked nothing. David says men ate the bread of angels (Psalms 78:24 ...manna...and had given them of the corn of heaven; Psalms 105:40 ...and satisfied them with the bread of heaven.) All that in a desert!! All that represented Christ, who is all the resources of heaven for man's salvation. (John 6:32 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.)
8	<i>Here is love—the contemplation of which should fill the soul with inexpressible gratitude! <u>Oh, what love, what matchless love!</u></i>	Isaiah 48:20 Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob.	The Love of God to Jacob is shown here. The story is like this. God anoints His Son, with His Spirit. Sends Him into Babylon (the enemy's territory). The Son does the Father's pleasure in Babylon and is prosperous. In the Son is every resource of heaven for man's salvation. After that, those freed from Babylon, (i.e. from the Devil's grip) go out of Babylon with singing and praise extolling the Love of God. It is this Love of God, that He sent his only-begotten Son that fills the soul with inexpressible gratitude. The idea of three co-equal partners one of which decides to give himself for sin cannot fill the soul with the same gratitude. The gratitude is in what the Father did for us. This is the Gospel. Notice "Go ye forth...declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth..."
9	It will lead the disciple to	Isaiah 48:17 Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy	Notice again the clear parallels. The accomplishment of the Son of God is such that

<p>deny self, take up the cross, and follow the Redeemer</p>	<p>One of Israel; I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, <i>which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.</i></p> <p>Isaiah 48:20 Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth; say ye, The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob.</p>	<p>we take up our crosses and follow him. Isaiah says “he leadeth us by the way we should go”.</p> <p>Isaiah goes further and declares the Gospel of Christ to be proclaimed to the end of the World. That is Matthew 28:19 from Isaiah 48! The redeemed go forth following Christ in proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the world. That is so because the Father anointed His Son with the Father’s Spirit, hence the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.</p> <p>There is no three-in-one god here.</p>
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In this table we have matched EGW’s statements with Isaiah 48 and seen that they tally completely. Even though we could give more tallies between Isaiah 48 and EGW’s quotation, we think this is enough to make the point. That is the point that EGW supported her writings with a “Thus saith the Lord”. The “Thus saith the Lord” is right here in Isaiah 48. We further make the point that when correctly understood, the language of the Spirit helps us to harmonise the Old and New Testament, that Matthew 28:19 comes from Isaiah chapter 48 especially verses 16 and 20.

Notice that all the elements of the great commission are found here. We compare again.

<p>Matthew 28:18 ...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.</p>	<p>Isaiah 45:15 ...The LORD hath loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans. 15 I, even I, have spoken; yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous.</p>
<p>Matthew 28:19 Go ye therefore and teach all nations... Matthew 28:20 ...Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:</p>	<p>Isaiah 48:20 Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it... Isaiah 48:16 I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit</p>
<p>Matthew 28:19 ...baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the <u>Son</u>, and of the <u>Holy Ghost</u>...</p>	<p>Isaiah 48:16 Come ye near unto me, hear ye this ... and now the Lord GOD, and <u>his Spirit</u>, hath sent <u>me</u> [Son].</p>
<p>Matthew 28:20 ...and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.</p>	<p>Isaiah 48:17 ...which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go. Isaiah 48:20 ...even to the end of the earth.</p>

We therefore propose that EGW is speaking of Isaiah chapter 48 in the quotation in question. Hence using the same language as this passage, EGW expresses the three, the Father, the Son and the Spirit without any reference to any idea of equality of the three. Instead she uses the same language to express how the Father sent the Son by anointing the Son with His (God’s) Spirit. Linking this up with John 3:16, EGW ends with the amazing Love of God, the Father, in giving up his Son forever, yes forever.

Keeping true to the language of the Bible, the fact that they are three, the Father, the Son and the Spirit of the Father, does not remove the established fact that God is the Father, the Great Source of All, and that both the Son of God and the Spirit of God belong to the One God, the Father. The three are not default co-equal partners as some would want to teach. The Father is greater, doing the

decision, the anointing and the sending over His ONLY-BEGOTTEN Son, and the Spirit of Promise, the Promise of the Father according to Luke 12:49, Acts 1:4 and 2:33. Everything comes from the Father the Great Source of All.

“All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father’s life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the **great Source of all**. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.” { DA 21.2}

The parallel

We may not end without pointing that the Bible itself draws parallels between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God. This is another long discussion, but here is the short of it.

1 Corinthians 2:11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

As the spirit of man, that belongs to man is to man, to know the things of man, as if the spirit of man is another intelligent entity in itself, so is the Spirit of God, that belongs to God, to God. Hence the language of the Spirit, presented as a separate individual yet belonging to and being both the Father and the Son themselves (John 14:20-23).

Broader Implications

Lastly, the pioneer Adventist doctrines were pillars of the same structure because they work together to support the structure of doctrines. Removing one would weaken if not destroy the structure. You may have noticed by now that the belief that a spirit of man is not another intelligent independent person separate from the man which goes away alive when a man dies (popularly known as the State of the Dead doctrine) worked together with their understanding of who God, his Son and His Spirit are. That is so despite the many times in the Bible that the spirit of a man is spoken of as a separate individual from the possessor of the spirit, as we saw in the pages above. If the God of who man is an image was such that he is formed of a Spirit which is a separate intelligent entity independent of the possessor thereof, then there would be every reason that the man be the same. In that case, the immortality of the soul and spiritualism would be affirmed. But it is not so in original Adventist belief.

It is therefore necessary to investigate the source of the immortality of the soul doctrine and the resulting practice of spiritualism. We find its origin in Genesis 3:4 (“thou shall not surely die”), but more clearly embodied in the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church where dead saints are immortalised and venerated. With that, we link that all Catholic doctrines originate from the three-in-one god doctrine.

“The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the "hierarchy of the truths of faith". The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men "and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin".” (Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraph 234) (emphasis added)

In addition, it may be highlighted at this point that pagan spiritualistic religions often have their form of multiple composite gods. Having seen that, it is not surprising that the immortality of the soul, the teaching behind spiritualism and the three-in-one god doctrine have the same common denominator, i.e. that a spirit is actually not a spirit, but just another intelligent being CO-EQUALLY capable of existence and decision-making separate from the said possessor of such a spirit.

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