

Feed My Sheep: 1 & 2 Peter False Teachers

Lesson #11 for June 10, 2017

Scriptures: 2 Peter 2:1-22; John 8:34-36; Matthew 12:43-45; Jude 4-19; Genesis 18:16-33.

1. In this lesson we will discuss Peter's concerns regarding false teachers and the deceptions that were arising within the early church. We often think of the early church as a pure church. (Revelation 2:1-7) What kind of false teachers do you think were there? However, we must remember that even among the disciples of Jesus, there was a traitor.
2. So, what were some of the false teachings that Peter was warning about? Why did he feel so strongly about those false teachers and their teachings?
3. The false teachings included the idea that believers could continue to live according to their old sinful ways and still be saved. Peter was concerned that they would bring in destructive doctrines and lead others astray. How many Christians today are affected by false teachings that lead to things like "cheap grace," or "theistic evolution," etc.? Think of the disgrace that has been brought on the Roman Catholic Church by the behavior of some of their priests.

We have far more to fear from within than from without. The hindrances to strength and success are far greater from the church itself than from the world. Unbelievers have a right to expect that those who profess to be keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, will do more than any other class to promote and honor, by their consistent lives, by their godly example and their active influence, the cause which they represent. But how often have the professed advocates of the truth proved the greatest obstacle to its advancement! The unbelief indulged, the doubts expressed, the darkness cherished, encourage the presence of evil angels, and open the way for the accomplishment of Satan's devices.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* March 22, 1887, par. 4; *1SM** 122.3; *LDE** 156.2.

Satan will work with all power and "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness." 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10. His working is plainly revealed by the rapidly increasing darkness, the multitudinous errors, heresies, and delusions of these last days. **Not only is Satan leading the world captive, but his deceptions are leavening the professed churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. The great apostasy will develop into darkness deep as midnight, impenetrable as sackcloth of hair. To God's people it will be a night of trial, a night of weeping, a night of persecution for the truth's sake. But out of that night of darkness God's light will shine.**—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons** 414.3 (1905); *PK** 717.1; *Mar** 165.5. [Bold type is added.] Did persecution keep the very early church pure?

4. Have any problems arisen within the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Remember what happened at the General Conference session at Minneapolis in 1888. (See *1SM* 233-235.)
5. Read 2 Peter 2:1-3. Think about the strategy of Satan and his evil angels during the final century before Christ and then the first century after Christ.
6. If you read the first three chapters of *Desire of Ages*, it is clear that Satan believed that he had just about conquered the Jewish people and that he would win the great controversy. Then, Jesus was born, and we have the story of His life. Satan was certain that he would be able to get Jesus to sin; or, if he could not get Jesus to sin, he would make the life of Jesus so difficult that Jesus would give up on the plan of salvation and go back to heaven, thus breaking up the plan of salvation. Even after Satan had failed to get Jesus to do either of

those things, he (Satan) and all of his evil angels tried to keep Jesus in the tomb; (DA 779.1) but, they could not do that either!

7. Satan and all his evil host really believed, as did the Jewish leaders, that once Jesus was dead and buried, His followers would scatter, and no one would hear from them again. But, then came Pentecost! Satan was extremely disappointed, and he used all his energy to try to destroy the new church both from outside and from inside.
8. Read 2 Peter 2:1-3,10-22. Clearly, Peter believed that false teachers were entering in among the church members, trying to lead them astray. Those false teachers were led astray by many different things from immoral lust to hope of gain, etc. Those things caused them to make proud and stupid statements like “pagan gods came down and stole human wives!”
9. It is very likely that the warnings in the first few verses of 2 Peter 2 were the reason that Peter wrote this letter. Clearly, Peter thought that the church was in serious danger not only from outside persecution, as spelled out in 1 Peter, but also from internal problems.
10. This should not be surprising. Think of the church leaders even in the days of Jesus. They were so sure that they were right that they opposed the Messiah for whom the Jews had been waiting for hundreds of years!
11. How often have Seventh-day Adventists thought or even suggested that we were/are in great shape because “we have the truth”? If the truth really had us, we would have been in the kingdom before this! (See *Evangelism* 694-697.)
12. Read 2 Peter 2:18-19. What does it actually mean to be free from sin? We are surrounded by it, almost immersed in it. Try to imagine what it was like for Jesus to grow up in Nazareth? Why would God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in counsel together—choose Nazareth as the place for Jesus to grow up? Was Nazareth the “sin city” of His day?
13. False teachers teach false, boastful words and appeal to lustful desires attracting those who have just escaped from those errors. It is easy to fall back into sins that we have been accustomed to doing in the past. Former friends and acquaintances will try to get Christians to return to their old ways. The sexual sins connected to the pagan religions of Jesus’s day were great attractions to those who had once been involved in them.
14. It will always seem attractive to world-loving Christians that they can continue in their favorite sins and still be saved!
15. Read John 8:34-36. Jesus wants to set us free from sin. In this passage Jesus was speaking to the spiritual leaders of His day who really believed that because they were descendants of Abraham and because they were following all the Pharisaical requirements, they had a guaranteed ticket to the kingdom! (DA 171.2) And Jesus was offering to set them free from slavery and bondage! They could not imagine that they could be slaves of sin!
16. Could it be that some of those false teachers were coming with the same erroneous ideas that Paul warned about in Romans and Galatians—that people could be saved by their own works or that they needed to be circumcised and follow all of the Jewish rites and ceremonies in order to be saved?
17. What is freedom in Christ? Could a “faithful” Seventh-day Adventist be in bondage to sin? How many of us are more concerned about our situation on this earth and what people might think of us or earning a living than we are about preparation for the kingdom of heaven?
18. Read 2 Peter 2:17-22 and Matthew 12:43-45. People who carefully study the progress of Christian churches including the Seventh-day Adventist Church are very aware that many enter the church remain for a brief time only to then leave again. Why is that so commonly true? Returning to old habits is easy, especially when former friends are doing their best to

get us to do so! Could it be true that as Peter warned, it would have been better never to have known the way of righteousness (2 Peter 2:21) than to have been a Christian and then left it? Why would that be? Is it true that if one falls back into his old habits, it is even more difficult to return to the righteous ways that God calls for? Old habits die hard.

We have little idea of the strength that would be ours if we would connect with the Source of all strength. We fall into sin again and again, and think it must always be so. We cling to our infirmities as if they were something to be proud of. Christ tells us that we must set our face as a flint if we would overcome. He has borne our sins in His own body on the tree; and through the power He has given us, we may resist the world, the flesh, and the devil. Then let us not talk of our weakness and inefficiency, but of Christ and His strength. When we talk of Satan's strength, the enemy fastens his power more firmly upon us. When we talk of the power of the Mighty One, the enemy is driven back. As we draw near to God, He draws near to us.—Ellen G. White, *Youth's Instructor*,* January 4, 1900, par. 1; *MYP** 105.1; *AG** 262.2.

We want all to understand how the soul is destroyed. It is not that God sends out a decree that man shall not be saved. He does not throw a darkness before the eyes which cannot be penetrated. But man at first resists a motion of the Spirit of God, and, having once resisted, it is less difficult to do so the second time, less the third, and far less the fourth. Then comes the harvest to be reaped from the seed of unbelief and resistance. Oh what a harvest of sinful indulgences is preparing for the sickle!—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 5, 120.2.

19. However, we all know of people who have left the church and then come back. When one comes to Christ, it brings joy in heaven. (See Luke 15:11-32.) But, Peter said that returning to our old ways is like a dog returning to his vomit. This might seem like a nauseating and disgusting parallel; but, Peter wanted to be very stark in his warning. Was Peter thinking about the warnings of Jesus in Matthew 12:45 and Luke 11:26?
20. What can we do to help new members become more firmly established in the church and realize how important it is to remain faithful?
21. The church needs to get every member involved in activities that stimulate the mind and help to reach out to others. We need to organize Bible study classes that will lead our members to a deeper and more interesting understanding of Scripture. At the same time, we need to involve them in projects to reach out to non-members in order to bring more into the church.
22. How would you describe the sin or sins of the wicked angels? Did they break any of the Ten Commandments? What does it mean to slander the angels? Peter and Jude also mentioned Noah, Lot, and Balaam, as well as the children of Israel leaving Egypt. What do those examples teach us about God's power to destroy? We know that every one of us is dependent upon the power of God for every breath and every heartbeat. Does God ever take away the life of any of His children in the first death? This is a question which has raised a lot of discussion among many including Seventh-day Adventists. There is an entire handout on our website at www.theox.org describing "The Final End of Sin and Sinners" which includes almost every passage in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy on that subject.
23. There are very apparent parallels between 2 Peter 2:1-3:7 and Jude 4-19. Why do you suppose that is? Was Peter borrowing from Jude? Or, was Jude borrowing from Peter? Or, were they both borrowing from elsewhere?
24. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 and Matthew 6:13. Can we be assured that God has promised to help us when we need it? Is it clear how to recognize false teachings?
25. Read 2 Peter 2:12 and Jude 10. What would lead to such serious, unreasoning, and

irrational behavior? Sin degrades us down to the level of an animal, controlled by our own passions. God wants us to be transformed by His grace into His own image. We will be transformed into the image of whatever fills our minds. (See GC 555.1.) So, what is the world filling its mind with in our day? What fills the hours of television broadcasting and the pages of the Internet?

26. Consider some of the parallels between 2 Peter 2:1-3:3 and Jude 3-19. Words below in quotation marks are from the *Good News Bible*.

2 Peter 2:1-3:3	Jude 3-19
False prophets and false teachers will bring in destructive, untrue doctrines.	Godless people have slipped in, distorting the message of grace.
They will deny the Master who redeemed them.	They reject Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Master.
They will bring upon themselves sudden destruction.... Their Judge has been ready.	The Scriptures predicted the condemnation they received.
God did not spare the angels who sinned but threw them into "hell," chained in darkness.	Angels did not stay within the limits of their proper authority but abandoned their dwelling place; now, they are bound with eternal chains in the darkness below.
God rescued the people of Israel from Egypt; but, later, He destroyed those who did not believe.	God brought a flood on the ancient world, sparing only Noah and his family.
God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire, making them examples.	Sodom and Gomorrah and the nearby towns indulged in sexual immorality and perversion and suffered eternal fire as a plain warning.
"9And so the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials and how to keep the wicked under punishment for the Day of Judgement, 10especially those who follow their filthy bodily lusts and despise God's authority."	[People in Peter's day] "8... have visions which make them sin against their own bodies; they despise God's authority and insult the glorious beings above."
"7He rescued Lot, a good man, who was distressed by the immoral conduct of lawless people. 8That good man lived among them, and day after day he suffered agony as he saw and heard their evil actions."	Those false teachers were bold and arrogant, and showed no respect for the glorious beings above; instead, they insulted them.
"12But these people act by instinct, like wild animals born to be captured and killed; they attack with insults anything they do not understand. They will be destroyed like wild animals, 13and they will be paid with suffering for the suffering they have caused."	"10But these people attack with insults anything they do not understand; and those things that they know by instinct, like wild animals, are the very things that destroy them."
"13... Pleasure for them is to do anything in broad daylight that will satisfy their bodily appetites; they are a shame and a disgrace as they join you in your meals, all the while enjoying their deceitful ways!"	"11How terrible for them! They have followed the way that Cain took. For the sake of money they have given themselves over to the error that Balaam committed.... 12With their shameless carousing they are like dirty spots in your fellowship meals. They take care only of themselves."
"14They want to look for nothing but the chance to commit adultery; their appetite for sin is never satisfied."	"13They are like wild waves of the sea, with their shameful deeds showing up like foam."

27. Scholars have noticed and suggested that the parallels between 2 Peter and Jude that we have studied in this lesson probably have not resulted from Peter copying Jude or from Jude copying Peter, but rather, that they both copied from some earlier, probably inspired, source which we no longer have available to us. Those who have a high view of inspiration and who believe that both of these books were inspired by God would claim that God is the Author or Inspirer in both cases and that He was repeating for emphasis. Does that seem like a reasonable answer to you?

28. What sources of corruption are entering the minds and lives of Christians in our day? How many shameful things enter the homes of Christians and Seventh-day Adventists by means of television and the Internet? How many false teachings have thus been suggested? What forms do false teachers take in the church and in the world today? How can we be sure to recognize them? Is it easy to recognize every avenue that Satan uses to attack us?
29. Notice that these problems do not include the persecutions coming to Christians from outside the church. These are sins which happen within—and from within—the church.
30. Read Genesis 13:12-13; 18:16-33; and 19:12-25. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah and the experience of loss by Lot's family in that wicked place is a very sad one. What do you think actually happened to those cities? We know that God's two angels led Lot, his wife, and his two daughters out of Sodom. However, soon, his wife turned around and became a pillar of salt. Considering the subsequent stories of Lot, his two daughters, and their descendants, would it have been better if they all had perished in Sodom? Remember that under inspiration, Peter twice described Lot as a "good man." (2 Peter 2:7-8, *GNB*) Why are these stories included in Scripture? Wouldn't it have been better just to have left those stories out? Peter saw two lessons from the story of Sodom and Lot: 1) God is able to control even the destinies of the wicked; (2 Peter 2:6) and 2) He knows how, by whatever means necessary, to rescue the righteous. (2 Peter 2:7-9)
31. The story of Balaam is also mentioned. Read Numbers 22:1-24:25 and 31:8. What a sad story! How many Seventh-day Adventists today are being led into sin by their greed for money? Is the story of Balaam part of the reason Paul said: "For the love of money is a source of all kinds of evil. Some have been so eager to have it that they have wandered away from the faith and have broken their hearts with many sorrows." (1 Timothy 6:10, *GNB**)
32. Many Seventh-day Adventists today, especially in the developed world, are doing very well financially. But, virtually all Seventh-day Adventists have available to them a wealth of spiritual material including the Bible and the writings of Ellen White. We are more spiritually blessed than any other group in history. There is no way that we can say that we have not been warned about what is coming.

One thing is certain: Those Seventh-day Adventists who take their stand under Satan's banner will first give up their faith in the warnings and reproofs contained in the Testimonies of God's Spirit.—Ellen G. White, *Letter 156, 1903*,* 2 (To Brother Magan, July 27, 1903.); *1MR** 102.4; *3MR** 259.2; *3SM** 84.3; *LDE** 177.4; *SpM** 305.4.

The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through [178] different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony.—Ellen G. White, *Letter 12, 1890*,* 14 (Written at Petoskey, Michigan, August 12, 1890, to Brother and Sister Garmire); *10MR** 311.1; *1SM** 48.3 (1890); *2SM** 78.2; *FLB** 296.6; *Mar** 158.4; *LDE** 177.5. [Bold type is added.] (Note that this letter was written in the aftermath of the General Conference session of 1888.)

33. As we noted earlier, Peter discussed *freedom in Christ*. What does *freedom in Christ* mean? We can think of examples in Christian history such as that of Martin Luther that give us a hint. To believe that somehow by multitudes of so-called holy behaviors, we can earn our way to heaven must certainly be a heavy burden. But, believing in the idea of *freedom in Christ* has some dangers.

The great truth of our entire dependence upon Christ for salvation lies close to the error of presumption. Freedom in Christ is by thousands mistaken for lawlessness; and because Christ came to release us from the condemnation of the law, many declare that the law itself is done away, and that those who keep it are fallen from grace. And thus, as truth and error appear so near akin, minds that are not guided by the Holy Spirit will be led to accept the error and, in so doing, place themselves under the power of Satan's deceptions. In thus leading people to receive error for truth, Satan is working to secure the homage of the Protestant world.—Ellen G. White, *The Home Missionary*,* November 1, 1893, par. 25; *Christ Triumphant** 324.2.

34. In this lesson so far we have discussed the challenges of false teachings. We do not know exactly what teachings Peter was talking about. When does it become dangerous to think ideas that are different from our fellow believers? If the church were believing and doing all of the right things, wouldn't we be in the kingdom of heaven by now? Do all the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church fully understand the gospel and the truth about the great controversy? In what sense are we really Laodicean? Is the Holy Spirit the only thing that we are lacking? Why hasn't Jesus come before this? (2 Peter 3:10-12; *Evangelism* 694-697)
35. Why is it that so many of our Christian friends twist the idea of *freedom in Christ* to suggest that it is no longer necessary to keep the Sabbath commandment? How could we answer such claims?
36. What are some of the counterfeit teachings that are popular in Christian churches in our day? For every truth, Satan has sought out some kind of counterfeit. For example, 1) Sunday for the Sabbath; 2) Immortality of the soul for the true nature of man; 3) Cheap grace for true freedom in Christ; 4) "Once saved, always saved" for a growing relationship with God; etc.
37. Having been warned about false teachers, how can we be sure to identify them? Only by a careful examination of Scripture, can we distinguish the true from the false.
38. Peter assured us that while the wicked will ultimately be destroyed, God will rescue the righteous. But, how can we be sure that we are on God's side?
39. It has been said that "what we learn from history is that we don't learn from history" and "if we do not learn from the past, we are doomed to repeat it." Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-12. What have we learned from these passages in 2 Peter and Jude that warn us of dangers in our day.
40. There are many Christians who feel that strict doctrine is not necessary. Since Christians are supposed to be loving, shouldn't we love everyone despite their differences? Read Deuteronomy 13:1-3. Many Christian evangelists and preachers today perform so-called miracles; but, those miracles prove nothing. If we were to believe everything that is stated by some Christian evangelist performing so-called miracles, we would have to believe a lot of very contradictory things!
41. Why do you think Peter took up so much space in his letter talking about the dangers of false teachings and those who want to lead the church astray? Compare Paul's warnings to the leaders of Ephesus. (Acts 20:28-31)
42. Do you think you and your Sabbath school class and your church are prepared for this kind of deceptive teachings in the final days of this earth's history?

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