

Peter on the Great Controversy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Pet. 2:9, 10; Deut. 14:2; 1 Pet. 4:1–7; 2 Pet. 1:16–21; 2 Pet. 3:3–14; Dan. 2:34, 35.*

Memory Text: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (*1 Peter 2:9, NKJV*).

Peter's writings abound with the great controversy theme. Maybe that's because he knew for himself, better than most, how easy it is to fall for Satan's deceptions. Thus, he was keenly aware of how real the struggle is. After all, it was Peter who wrote: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (*1 Pet. 5:8, NKJV*).

Peter sees the struggle unfolding in various ways. He sees a struggle going on in the church, which includes those who once fellowshiped with the believers but who are now cynical and dismissive of God and of any thought of Christ's return. He speaks strongly, and powerfully, against the scoffers, because if faith in the promise of Christ's return were to be lost, what hope remains?

Again, maybe Peter affirms faith so positively because of his own failures. He knows what it is like to scoff and deny and try to fit in with the crowd so that others would not condemn him for being a follower of Jesus. Hence his emphasis on how crucial it is for believers to live a life reflective and worthy of their high calling and election in the Lord.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 12.

Darkness to Light

Read 1 Peter 2:9, 10. How is the great controversy seen in these two verses?

These verses come from Exodus 19:6, “‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’” (*NKJV*); and Deuteronomy 7:6 (repeated in *Deut. 14:2*), “‘a holy people,’” “‘chosen . . . to be a people for Himself,’” and “‘a special treasure’” (*NKJV*). These assurances were, of course, given during the Exodus, when God’s people were being released from slavery and on the way to the Promised Land. Peter sees a parallel between the people of God during the Exodus and the church in his day.

Thus, Peter’s words are not a description of the end product but, rather, of a work in progress. Yes, we have been chosen and elected by Him, and we are to publicly praise God for bringing us out of the darkness that Satan has engulfed the world in. But that doesn’t make us perfect or mean that we have somehow arrived (*see Phil. 3:12*). On the contrary, awareness of our own sinfulness and shortcomings is a crucial aspect of what it means to follow Jesus and to sense our need for His righteousness in our own lives.

“It is thus that every sinner may come to Christ. ‘Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.’ Titus 3:5. When Satan tells you that you are a sinner, and cannot hope to receive blessing from God, tell him that Christ came into the world to save sinners. We have nothing to recommend us to God; but the plea that we may urge now and ever is our utterly helpless condition that makes His redeeming power a necessity. Renouncing all self-dependence, we may look to the cross of Calvary and say,—‘In my hand no price I bring; / Simply to Thy cross I cling.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 317.

One sure way we know that we have been called “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (*1 Pet. 2:9, NKJV*) is our awareness of just how dependent we are upon Christ, “who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (*1 Cor. 1:30, NIV*).

What goes through your head when you feel overwhelmed and discouraged by your deeds and even your own character? How do you deal with those thoughts when they come? How can you turn these times to your own spiritual advantage?

Peer Pressure

Read 1 Peter 4:1–7. Why are our lifestyle choices important, and how do they affect our readiness for Christ’s return?

Peter comments that believers have already spent enough of their lives doing what others around them pressured them to do (*1 Pet. 4:3*). But now things have changed, and believers may be thought “strange” for not joining the crowd, possibly resulting in malicious gossip being spread about them (*1 Pet. 4:4, NKJV*). Thus, Satan will even use former friends to try to discourage us in our walk with God.

Peter encourages believers not to be intimidated by these assaults. The “Gentiles” will need to give an account of themselves to God, who alone is judge, so there is no need to worry about what they think (*1 Pet. 4:5*).

His point is crucial. How many people do you know who have buckled under the pressure of other people’s expectations, rather than standing up for what they believe? This is especially tough on young people, who struggle with what is known as “peer pressure.”

Instead of us being concerned about being accepted by others and conforming to their opinions and their demands and their expectations of us, Peter admonishes believers to be kind and loving to those we come in contact with (*1 Pet. 4:8, 9*). This is not just an added extra, some additional duty we must fit into our Christian to-do list. Rather, it is the most important thing we do and the most important way of interacting with people around us. Maybe that is why Peter suggests that we need to get serious in our prayers (*1 Pet. 4:7*), because God knows that sometimes we can be more serious about pleasing the “Gentiles” than relating lovingly and kindly to those close to us. We need to pray not only for them but also that we would allow God to make us more sensitive to their concerns. As “a royal generation and a holy priesthood,” we are called to influence them for the good, as opposed to allowing them to influence us for the bad. The tragic history of Israel was just that: the pagans, instead of being influenced for good by Israel, influenced Israel for evil.

What kind of peer pressures do you face? How can you resist? In what ways are the words “overcome evil with good” (*Rom. 12:21*) so appropriate in such situations?

The More Sure Word of Prophecy

Read 2 Peter 1:16–21. What is Peter saying about prophecy that is so important?

Peter had seen many things in his time, and he lists some in this passage: Jesus transfigured on the mount (*2 Pet. 1:18*), and the confirmation of the prophecies concerning Jesus (*2 Pet. 1:19*). Each of these had impacted Peter deeply; yet, he spends more time on the last point—the prophecies. This may have something to do with his own failures as a disciple. How many times had Peter not listened to what Jesus was saying because he thought he already knew what was being said? How many times did Jesus foretell His coming treatment at the hands of the chief priests in Jerusalem; yet, when things happened exactly as Jesus had said, on a number of separate occasions, Peter was caught unprepared? Probably the most painful of all these “failures” was when Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him. Peter was so sure that could never happen, but when it did, it must have been the lowest point in his life.

Maybe this is why Peter sets out to clarify how to be a faithful follower of Jesus. He reminds the followers of “exceedingly great and precious promises” through which they “may be partakers of the divine nature” as opposed to those who are imprisoned by “the corruption that is in the world through lust” (*2 Pet. 1:4, NKJV*). To ensure that the believers have indeed escaped the corruption, he lists a number of interconnected qualities that define the Christian lifestyle: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (*2 Pet. 1:5–8*). Each builds on the other, and together they form a complete unit—like ingredients in a cake. Paul calls these same qualities “fruit” rather than fruits (*Gal. 5:22, 23*), because they form a unit that cannot be separated.

Peter goes further by saying that the believers would not stumble if they made these values part of their lives and asks them to diligently make their “calling and election sure” (*2 Pet. 1:10*).

Remember that Peter is addressing his epistle to Christian members established in the faith. He is by no means suggesting that conforming to a special set of requirements will ensure a ticket into heaven. He is simply contrasting the prevailing attitudes and behaviors of the time and challenging Christians to spend their energies on positive things rather than negative ones.

Scoffers

Read 2 Peter 3:3–7. What is Peter saying here about the past that can help us deal with issues in the present, as well as in the future?

The battle between light and darkness, between the followers of Jesus and the promoters of evil, seems about to reach its climax. The devil, as a hungry roaring lion looking for its next meal (*1 Pet. 5:8*), is aided by a chorus of mockers (scoffers). With their “rational” and “scientific” arguments (*2 Pet. 3:3, 4*), these scoffers try to neutralize the faith of believers. Peter suggests that what motivates them is their desire to maintain their lustful lifestyle (*2 Pet. 3:3*; see also *Jude 18*). They reason that Jesus is not coming because everything just keeps going as it always has.

There is one very disturbing feature about this mockery. Jesus said, “I will come again” (*John 14:1–3*), but these scoffers are saying, in effect, “Jesus will not come again” (*2 Pet. 3:4*). This is an echo from Eden, where God said, “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (*Gen. 2:17, NKJV*). However, Satan, through the serpent, said, “‘You will not surely die’” (*Gen. 3:4, NKJV*). Here is a direct contradiction of the word of God, now repeated by not just one voice, as in the Garden, but by a chorus of voices, everywhere. One redeeming feature of this lie is that Peter predicted it. Every time we hear someone scoffing at the idea of Jesus coming again, they themselves become another fulfillment of prophecy.

Although history has witnessed the previous destruction of the earth by a catastrophic Flood, the scoffers don’t want to know about that. They do not want to admit that God has anything to do with their personal life choices. They also want to avoid the fact that the same God who stored up water to flood the earth has similarly stored up fire to sweep over the earth to destroy it on the great Judgment Day (*2 Pet. 3:5–7*). Their mistaken hope is that nature will just keep on going as it always has.

How do we, as the years go by, hold on to the promise of the Second Coming? Why is it crucial that we do?

Hastening the Day

Although the wait for the Second Coming seems never-ending to us, the time is not a concern to God. “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8, NKJV). Throughout the Scriptures the end is always close, whether the day of the Lord in the Old Testament or the return of Christ in the New.

Read 2 Peter 3:8–14. What is the long-term hope we are given here?

See also Dan. 2:34, 35, 44.

The classic time prophecies clearly tell us that there is a limit to how long evil is allowed to continue and how long God will wait. In the prophecies, God outlines His strategy to end sin and suffering and to restore the earth to its original perfection.

How we view the end of all things, as we know it, will affect how we live now (2 Pet. 3:12). If we rebel at the idea of God disturbing our little world, then we will tend to be cynical and join the scoffers. If, on the other hand, we see this as a merciful God finally stepping in to clean up the abominable corruption and human-rights abuses so rampant around us, then we can with confidence “look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13, NKJV).

Again Peter voices his concern about our attitudes and personal conduct. He encourages us to “be diligent” and to be “without spot and blameless” (2 Pet. 3:14, NKJV). If it was not for the next verse, we may think that Peter is promoting a “works” religion, but he corrects this possible misunderstanding with the phrase, “the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation,” confirming the words of Paul to the same believers (2 Pet. 3:15).

Being blameless is our aim. That is how Job was described; blameless because he “feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1, NKJV). That is how Christ will present us to the Father (1 Cor. 1:8, Col. 1:22, 1 Thess. 3:13, 5:23). Being without spot? That is what the sacrificial lamb had to be (for example, Exod. 12:5, Lev. 1:3), what Jesus was (Heb. 9:14, 1 Pet. 1:19), and how He presents the church to the Father (Eph. 5:27).

In our quest to overcome sin, to grow in faith, and to shun evil and live holy and “blameless” lives, why must we always rely on the righteousness of Jesus that is credited to us by faith? What happens when we take our eyes off that promise?

Further Thought: Peter warned that scoffers would say: “‘everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation’” (2 Pet. 3:4, NIV). This was nothing new; the same sentiments were expressed before the Flood. “As time passed on, with no apparent change in nature, men whose hearts had at times trembled with fear, began to be reassured. They reasoned, as many reason now, that nature is above the God of nature, and that her laws are so firmly established that God Himself could not change them. Reasoning that if the message of Noah were correct, nature would be turned out of her course, they made that message, in the minds of the world, a delusion—a grand deception. They manifested their contempt for the warning of God by doing just as they had done before the warning was given. . . . They asserted that if there were any truth in what Noah had said, the men of renown—the wise, the prudent, the great men—would understand the matter.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 97. Today, “the great men” tell us something similar: the laws of nature are fixed and set, and all things continue on as before. In a sense, that’s what the theory of evolution teaches: life occurred through natural processes that can be explained, at least in principle, through the operation of natural laws that one day science will fully explain to us, and all without any need of deity. The “great men” were wrong then, and they are wrong now, as well. No wonder Paul wrote: “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (1 Cor. 3:19). It was in the time of the Flood, it was in Peter’s time, and it is in ours, as well.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Despite all the reasons Peter had to believe in Jesus, he still emphasized the “sure word of prophecy.” Why is prophecy so important to us? How did prophecy help prove that Jesus was the Messiah at His first coming? What hope does it give us for the Second Coming? After all, without prophecy, how could we even know about the promise and hope of the Second Coming?
- ② We tend to think of peer pressure only in the context of teenagers and young adults. But that’s not correct, is it? We all want to be liked and accepted by our peers. After all, we have a much better opportunity to be a good witness if they like us, as opposed to if they don’t, right? In our desire to be pleasing to others, how can we guard against compromising our beliefs? Why are such compromises easier to make than we might be inclined to think?

From Broken Promises to New Life: Part 1

When Francisco was a child, his father took him to bars and to other places a child should never go. Once when Francisco didn't want to go with his father, the man held a gun to his head.

When Francisco was 14, his father died. But the abuse the boy had suffered left deep scars. He began drinking and taking drugs to help him forget the pain. His mother and sisters began attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but Francisco was too drunk to notice.

By the time he was 18 he was living with his girlfriend, Neide, and her mother. He worked on oil rigs when he was sober.

When Francisco learned that Neide was pregnant, he was happy. But his new role had little influence on his life. Sometimes he beat Neide, as he had seen his father beat his mother. One day he beat her hard enough to cause her to lose the baby. When he realized what he had done, he rushed to the hospital to see her. On the way he prayed that God would help him get off drugs and alcohol. He promised Neide that he would change and treat her better. Neide believed him.

But nothing changed. The next time he beat her she told him to leave, that she never wanted to see him again. Francisco came to see her every day and promised that things would change. Eventually, she took him back.

Things did change. Francisco sank more deeply into drugs. One day he almost died from an overdose. He awoke in the hospital. Neide told him to never come home. Francisco knew she meant it, and he sank deeper into depression.

One of his sisters brought him a religious book to read. One night when he couldn't sleep, he picked up the book and started reading. Once more he prayed that God would release him from the bondage of drugs.

When he opened his eyes, Francisco saw a tall man dressed in brilliant white standing near his bed. The man touched Francisco's forehead. It seemed that the touch penetrated to the depths of his mind. Francisco lay still for several moments, then he realized the being was gone. He sat up in bed, still able to feel the pressure on his forehead. For the first time in his life he felt peace and hope.

Moments later his mother walked into his room. He told her that God had touched him and had taken away the desire for drugs and alcohol. "I'm a new man," he told her. "I'm a child of God. I want to go to church."

But his mother had seen him break his promises too many times. "You make promises, but you don't change," she told him. Francisco knew that she was right. He thought how deeply he had hurt her, but he was sure that this time was different. He convinced her to return the next day and take him to church with her.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.