

# 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 fellowshipped 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?

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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?

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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?**

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## The More Sure Word of Prophecy

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

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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?

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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.

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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 about 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.*



## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *1 Peter 4:1, 2*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Examine Peter’s teaching that the life of faith is fraught with opposition.

**Feel:** Nurture faith in God’s promises to overcome skepticism, persecution, and temptation to sin.

**Do:** Resolve to live according to God’s will.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Living by God’s Will in a Hostile World**

**A** What is essential to the believer’s self-identity that allows him or her to be guided by God’s will?

**B** In what ways is the world hostile to a life lived according to God’s purpose?

**C** What spiritual resources are available to the Christian in order to live a life that is guided by God’s will?

**II. Feel: Adopting the Mind of Christ Amid Suffering**

**A** How may believers overcome the pressure to conform to the sinful ways of the world around them?

**B** In what ways may the prospect of judgment encourage the believer to value his or her calling by God (out of darkness into His light)?

**III. Do: The Great Controversy and God’s Law of Love**

**A** How has your faith in Christ’s coming influenced the way you live from day to day? How will this week’s lesson influence the way you live? Can you say that you are living according to God’s will? How does the decision to live according to God’s will bring about “suffering”?

**B** What are the worldly pressures that you are facing, and how will you deal with them from here on out?

► **Summary:** Christ has suffered for us that in Him we may live for God rather than for the world.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *1 Peter 4:1, 2*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Living according to God’s Word requires us to renounce the world and its pleasures. Such a task is not so easily accomplished in a pleasure-seeking world, especially considering our own sinful nature and the influences around us. However, by understanding our identity in Christ, we can rely on His promises to live in accordance with His will.

**Just for Teachers:** The lesson this week focuses on the reality that we face as Christians and as Seventh-day Adventists; namely, facing slander for the things that we believe and resisting the pressures from unbelievers who would influence us to join them in evil practices. Encourage class members to persevere in their commitment to remain faithful to Christ amid persecution and to cultivate the patience and fortitude necessary to withstand the pressures exerted by worldly influences.

**Opening Activity:** Invite three or four individuals from the class to discuss their own experiences of facing opposition to their faith and how they dealt with it.

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Proper understanding of our identity as Christians is at the foundation of living according to God’s will. This week we study 1 and 2 Peter in relation to the great controversy theme. Peter uplifts Christ as the Great Sufferer who has not only set an example but whose atoning sacrifice enables us to lead godly lives in a hostile world. Satan’s unrelenting efforts to thwart our progress become the opportunity God uses to make our calling and election sure: in essence, demonstrating to the onlooking universe that we are a special people, a royal priesthood.

## Bible Commentary

**I. A People With a Purpose: God’s Special People** (*Review 1 Peter 2:9 with your class.*)

Ancient Israel was chosen as God’s special people (*Exod. 19:5, 6*). First

Peter applies this high calling to the believers scattered in Asia Minor (*1 Pet. 1:1, 2:9*) and to the Christian church at large.

The theme of Israel as God's special people is reiterated in Deuteronomy within the context of the covenant between God and Israel (*Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:18, 19*; Hebrew, *segullāh*, “treasured possession,” *NRSV*). Recall that the book of Deuteronomy is framed on the basis of ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties. In these treaties, a strong nation entered into a treaty with a weak nation. The strong nation offered protection to the weak nation against foreign aggression. In turn, the weak nation rendered loyalty and service to the strong nation. The weak nation paid taxes, tributes, and other forms of services to the strong nation. So close were some of the treaty relationships that the king of the strong nation referred to the king of the weak nation as son, while the vassal referred to the suzerain as father. This concept of “belonging to” underlies the relationship between believers and God.

Israel became God's special people when He took them from Egypt. Being God's people is Israel's identity, and this identity was to inform their actions (to keep God's commandments). As Christians, we are to keep God's commandments; that is, live according to His will, not so we can *become* God's people but because we *are* God's people. This is our identity, and this is what our action is based upon.

**Consider This:** Religion/faith is not just a set of beliefs but also self-identity. If we identify ourselves as God's holy and peculiar people, this identity will inform what we do. What difference would it make if Christians were to think more of who they were *before* yielding to pressure from family, friends, or the surrounding culture? Similarly, how much of a difference would it make if teenagers asked who they were before joining their peers in drug use, and so forth? How different would our Christian lives be if, *before* we acted, we asked ourselves, *Who are we?*

## II. Living According to God's Will: The Calling (*Review 1 Peter 4:1–9 with your class.*)

Unbelievers freely give in to their passions—drunkenness, reveling, carousing, lawless idolatry (*1 Pet. 4:3*). Christians cannot, with good conscience, do these things. Rather, they are called to holy living (“You shall be holy, for I am holy” [*1 Pet. 1:16, NRSV*]) and to support their faith with “goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love” (*2 Pet. 1:5–8, NRSV; compare 1 Pet. 4:8, 9*). As Christians, we live by the

will of God rather than by human desires (*1 Pet. 4:2*), for Christ has suffered on our behalf (*1 Pet. 4:1*), denying His own flesh in order that we might have freedom from the tyranny of the flesh and sin.

**Consider This:** Why is it erroneous and dangerous to believe that peer pressure is limited only to young people? What are some of the pressures that adults of various ages face from their peers? What are the biblical principles for facing and handling such pressures at any age during our Christian walk?

### III. Living According to God’s Will: The Promise (*Review 2 Peter 1:4–10 with your class.*)

Living according to God’s will is not salvation by works. It is based upon the promises of God and on what Christ has done for us. This is the salvation that the prophets prophesied about (*1 Pet. 1:10, 11*). Living according to God’s will is based upon the good news of the salvation we have in Christ (*1 Pet. 1:12*). And God has “given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (*2 Pet. 1:3, NRSV*), so that we “may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust” (*2 Pet. 1:4, NRSV*).

### IV. Scoffers Galore (*Review 2 Peter 3:3–14 with your class.*)

Peter speaks about the certainty of the Second Coming and final judgment (*2 Pet. 3:7, 10*) and of the fact that, toward the time of the end, some will scoff at these ideas. He argues that we can be certain about the Second Coming on the basis of past events, beginning with Creation and the Noachic Flood (*2 Pet. 3:6*). He also argues, in *2 Peter 3:11, 14*, that awareness of Christ’s coming should lead to a life of dedication.

**Consider This:** What is the relationship between faith in Christ’s second coming and morality (right and wrong behavior)?

## ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Assist class members in applying this week’s study to their lives individually. There is a clear distinction between a believer’s lifestyle and that of a nonbeliever, as we have seen in our study of *2 Peter 1:5–8*; compare *1 Peter 4:8, 9* and *1 Peter 4:3* for the contrasting lifestyles. This week’s study challenges the tendency to obliterate the distinctions between the Christian lifestyle and that of nonbelievers. It does so without falling into the trap of attempting to earn salvation by legalistic observance of law.

**Thought Questions:**

- ❶ What areas of my life do I need to change, relying on divine grace and the free gift of righteousness in Christ, in order for my life to be in accordance with God's will?
- ❷ In what ways are peer pressures an impediment to living according to God's will?
- ❸ What challenges do Christians face in their belief in the second coming of Christ?
- ❹ What is the relationship between our view on Christ's second coming and our action in our daily living?
- ❺ What role does prophecy play in our understanding of the Second Coming?

**Activity:** Peer pressure is not only a teenage phenomenon. While teens are often under pressure to conform to the norms defined by their peers, adults also struggle with pressure to conform to the standards set by their surrounding cultures or by the social classes to which they belong. For Seventh-day Adventists, there is likely to be pressure from fellow Christians who go to church on Sunday. How would you respond to someone who asks you why Seventh-day Adventists keep the Sabbath when the vast majority of Christians keep Sunday?

**►STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** **What we believe directly influences how we behave; and how we behave is often influenced by the kinds of people with whom we surround ourselves. Invite members of your class to dwell on the relationship between what one believes and how one lives.**

**Activity:** List concrete examples that illustrate the relationship between belief and behavior. We should also add that who we are—in this case, God's special people—should determine how we behave. In what concrete ways might you minister to fellow believers who are going through various kinds of suffering: for example, suffering as a result of peer pressure, exposure to environments in which people fall prey to the desires of the flesh, encounters with skeptics who do not believe in either the Second Coming or the prophetic teachings, and so forth?