

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

“Feed My Sheep”*: *First and Second Peter
Lesson 11. False Teachers

In the Christian faith, there is a true principle: If false doctrine is proclaimed, people will believe it if no one refutes it with truth. When teachers came from the church headquarters in Jerusalem to the churches in Galatia teaching false doctrine, Paul the apostle vigorously refuted their error in his Letter to the Galatians. He was obeying the command of Jude who said: “I gave all diligence to write unto you ... and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (vs. 3). The reason Jude gives is that false teachers had corrupted the truth of the gospel, and he was saying, Speak up for the truth!

Today some Christians shy away from “contention” for the gospel, saying, “we want peace and quiet.” The common saying is true: All that is needed for evil to triumph is for good men to say nothing. When the Son of God became incarnate on this earth, He had only a brief lifetime, but He spoke up so vigorously for the truth that He changed the world. We are rapidly approaching the final struggle of the “great controversy” between Christ and Satan. It’s too late in the day for anyone who loves Jesus to be content to be a spiritual coward.

But can anyone follow Christ truly and not be involved in warfare? Christ, who is heavily engaged in “the great controversy” says to us, “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. ... Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. ... He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt. 10:24, 34, 38). No room here for “couch potatoes”!

A current example of conflict that has raged in the minds and hearts for hundreds of years is “justification (or righteousness) by faith.” The battle has been going on for most of the 2000 years since Christ. One entire book in the New Testament is devoted to the conflict—the Book of Galatians. There was no way one could be a Christian then and not take a side either for what Paul declared is “the truth of the gospel” or for the false teachers who came from “Jerusalem” to oppose him. And the battle has not subsided! Bring up the subject in almost any church or Bible class, and you will see the sparks fly. Must the conflict go on and on forever? Or can those who choose to believe in Christ resolve the conflict and come into genuine and lasting heart unity? Is the Bible clear? Or is the very source of our faith itself muddled and confused?

The rejection of the 1888 light opened the way for false ideas to enter under the guise of righteousness by faith. Indeed, if we turn from the genuine, nothing can prevent our grasping the counterfeit. A. T. Jones, at the 1893 General Conference Session showed how the mind devoted to self becomes the mind of Satan. He traced its development

though paganism to the subtleties of Romanism. He said there are two kinds of justification by faith—a true and a counterfeit.

The counterfeit says that justification by faith is purely a legal pronouncement made millions of light years away that has no relation to our human heart; we verbally “accept Christ” and we start the heavenly machinery rolling. One’s name is then entered in God’s computer and our eternal social security benefits are *then* credited to our account. *Our decision* has initiated this process of legal acquittal. *We* were clever enough to put the coins in the washing machine. An element of pride can enter here; we initiated the process of our salvation. A perfect example of what Peter has told us: “While they promise [us] liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage” (2 Peter 2:19, NKJV).

Peter says that these false teachers smuggle in “destructive heresies” (2 Peter 2:1). One of the most distressing things about them was their denying the sovereign Lord who bought them. Christians are the property of Jesus because He bought them, as Peter says. The price He paid was His blood, His life (1 Peter 1:18, 19). The false teachers denied their Master by repudiating His ownership. This they did by their licentious conduct, returning to the slavery of sin.

The false teachers claimed to be liberated and enlightened. For them, Jesus was the messenger from the realm of light who came to awaken them to their true natures, to help them discover their true selves. He did not come to die but to inform, to reveal the great knowledge. He was not their Master, and they were not His slaves. Rather, they had the spark of divinity in themselves, just as Jesus did. They were not bound by any commands. Such was their gospel, and it was attractive. Peter says that they denied the Master who had bought them for the highest price imaginable and therefore owned them. The result of their impudence would be “swift destruction”—the judgment, even though they also denied that a judgment would take place (2 Peter 2:1).

The false teachers were popular—“Many will follow their destructive ways” (2 Peter 2:2)—and their immorality and that of their followers brought “the way of truth,” meaning Christianity, “into disrepute.”

Peter charges that an important motivation of the false teachers is greed—a covetousness for money, sex, and power (vs. 3). These teachers were especially adept at attracting women (2 Tim. 3:6), achieving control over their minds, their purses, their hearts, and their bodies.

How did they do it? With stories they made up (2 Peter 2:3), i.e., fabricated doctrines. Women and sensitive men were distressed and depressed by a harsh and oppressive world. The false teachers claimed to give the explanation of why things were as they were and how to be liberated from them. They claimed they had the real gospel, really good news that could restore the self-image and self-worth of people who felt devalued by the system. People were more than willing to pay to become one of the worthy.

But the 1888 messengers (E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones) counteracted these teachings with a new, liberating understanding of justification by faith:

(1) *It makes the believer to become obedient to the law of God, not by eradicating his sinful nature but by enabling him to triumph over it:* “God justifies the ungodly. ... It does not mean that He glosses over a man’s faults, so that he is counted righteous, although he is really wicked; but it means that He makes that man a doer of the law. The moment God declares an ungodly man righteous, that instant that man is a doer of the law. ... It will be seen, therefore, that there can be no higher state than that of justification. It does everything that God can do for a man short of making him immortal, which is done only at the resurrection. ... Faith and submission to God must be exercised continually, in order to retain the righteousness—in order to remain a doer of the law.” [1]

(2) *Saving faith is a heart appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ:* “In this blessed fact of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, which was accomplished for every soul, there is not only laid the foundation of faith for every soul, but in it there is given the *gift of faith* to every soul. And thus the cross of Christ is ... the very power of God manifested to deliver us from all sin, and bring us to God.” [2]

(3) *Genuine justification by faith is meaningless apart from appreciating how close Christ has come to us:* “There is no element of weakness in the law; the weakness is in the flesh. It is not the fault of a good tool that it cannot make a sound pillar out of a rotten stick. ... Poor, fallen man had no strength resting in his flesh to enable him to keep the law. And so God imputes to believers the righteousness of Christ, who was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, so that ‘the righteousness of the law’ might be fulfilled in their lives. ... Christ took upon Himself man’s nature, and will impart of His own righteousness to those who accept His sacrifice.” [3]

(4) *This special, unique message was intended by the Lord to prepare His people for translation:* What means, then, this special message of justification that God has been sending these [seven] years to the church and to the world? ... This special message of justification which God has been sending us is to prepare us for glorification at the coming of the Lord. In this, God is giving to us the strongest sign that it is possible for Him to give, that the next thing is the coming of the Lord. [4]

The 1888 message broke through centuries of fog into a clearer view of the sunlit New Testament truth.

God invites you to come to Him and get the issue settled once for all, so that your mind and heart are clear and your feet are set on the solid rock. David said, “I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings” (Psalm 40:1, 2).

Give God a day of your life (on your knees if possible), and prayerfully read in an authentic translation of the Bible itself (no paraphrases or commentaries), and let the fog be blown out of your mind and heart. Make your choice to *believe* how good the Good News is. Don't be proud and jump to conclusions; test and re-test your convictions. We can trust the Bible! Just read it with simple common sense.

—*Mainly from the writings of Robert J. Wieland*

Endnotes:

[1] E. J. Waggoner, *Signs of the Times*, May 1, 1893.

[2] A. T. Jones, *Review and Herald*, Oct. 24, 1899.

[3] E. J. Waggoner, *Bible Echo*, Feb. 15, 1892.

[4] A. T. Jones, *1895 General Conference Bulletin*, p. 367.

Suggested supplementary reading:

1. Robert J. Wieland and Donald K. Short, *1888 Re-examined*, chapter 9, "A False Righteousness by Faith: Sowing the Seed of Apostasy," p. 100ff.

2. Robert J. Wieland, *Grace on Trial: The Heartwarming Message the Lord "Sent" to Us in 1888*, chapter 6, "If You Can't Understand It, It's Not the Gospel," p. 65ff.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/YifHRmCpzM8>

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