

Light Shines *in the* Darkness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *John 8:44; Prov. 23:23; Acts 20:27–32; 2 Thess. 2:7–12; Ps. 119:105, 116, 130, 133, 160; Prov. 16:25; 2 Cor. 4:3–6.*

Memory Text: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.’” (*John 12:35, NKJV*).

In the Bible’s last book, Revelation, the devil is pictured as a dragon and a serpent (*Rev. 12:9*). He is a dragon because he desires to destroy God’s people, and he is a serpent because he uses all his cunning lies to deceive them. In the years after Christ’s death, thousands were tortured, thrown to lions, and burned at the stake by imperial Rome for refusing to worship its deities. Yet, in the face of this cruel punishment, many stayed faithful, the gospel continued to spread, and the church grew.

As a result, Satan changed his strategy. Scores of pagans were baptized but without thorough instruction in Bible truth. Error flooded into the church as leaders merged the truths of Scripture with popular customs. The fourth and fifth centuries were eras of compromise when church prelates blended pagan practices with Christian teachings.

Yet, even in life’s most difficult times, God was continually with His people. They found Jesus, “the way, the truth and the life,” and through the power of the Holy Spirit, they stood firm, even in the face of overwhelming pressure to yield their conscientious convictions. They stayed loyal to God’s revealed will in Scripture and unflinchingly stood for the truth of His Word, regardless of the pressure placed on them, either overtly or subtly.

* Study this week’s lesson, based on *The Great Controversy, chapter 3, to prepare for Sabbath, April 20.*

Compromise: Satan's Subtle Strategy

Compare John 14:6 with John 8:44. What contrast between Jesus' character and Satan's is seen in these two passages?

What Jesus says is true because He is the author of truth. Truth proceeds from the heart of an all-wise, all-loving, all-knowing God. He is the foundation of reality and of all truth.

In contrast, Satan is a liar and the father of lies. He is prepared to use lies, deceit, misinformation, and a distortion of the truth to lead God's people astray. He deceived Eve in Eden by distorting truth, creating doubt, and blatantly denying what God said. Satan's statement, "You shall not surely die," in the context of eating the fruit, was a clear contradiction of what God had said. Throughout the centuries, Satan has used the same strategy. He undermines confidence in God's Word, contradicts God's revealed will, distorts Scripture, and at times misquotes the Bible to his advantage.

Read Proverbs 23:23, John 17:17, and John 8:32. What similarity do you see in these Bible passages regarding the truth of God's Word? What is their central message?

"Satan well knew that the Holy Scriptures would enable men to discern his deceptions and withstand his power. It was by the word that even the Saviour of the world had resisted his attacks. At every assault, Christ presented the shield of eternal truth, saying, 'It is written.' To every suggestion of the adversary, He opposed the wisdom and power of the word. In order for Satan to maintain his sway over men, and establish the authority of the papal usurper, he must keep them in ignorance of the Scriptures. The Bible would exalt God and place finite men in their true position; therefore its sacred truths must be concealed and suppressed. This logic was adopted by the Roman Church. For hundreds of years the circulation of the Bible was prohibited. The people were forbidden to read it or to have it in their houses, and unprincipled priests and prelates interpreted its teachings to sustain their pretensions. Thus the pope came to be almost universally acknowledged as the vicerent of God on earth, endowed with authority over church and state."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 51.

Discuss ways that Satan attempts to distort or misinterpret God's Word today.

Savage Wolves

Read Acts 20:27–32. What specific warnings did the apostle Paul give to the church leaders from Ephesus regarding the coming apostasy?

The purpose of Paul’s counsel was to prepare the church for what was coming. In these passages, he describes his major concern.

His concern is that “savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (*Acts 20:29, NKJV*). In other words, believers would face fierce persecution from within the church.

The apostle expressed his concern when he said, “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (*Acts 20:30*). Heresies would enter the church. False doctrines would be substituted for divine truths. Pagan practices would prevail. In the fourth and fifth centuries, compromise subtly crept into the Christian church, with mission advance being the probable justification. But the terrible result was a departure from the truths of God’s Word.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:7–12. How does the apostle Paul describe the coming apostasy? What characteristics should believers look for?

Paul’s comment, “the mystery of lawlessness does already work,” is significant. Even in Paul’s day, there was a gradual departure from the truth of God’s Word regarding obedience to God’s law. This departure would flourish in the later centuries.

Contrary to the second commandment, idols were introduced into Christian worship. For millennia, idols were in the forefront of all pagan religions. To make Christianity more acceptable to heathens coming into the Christian church, pagan deities were renamed as so-called saints. Sunday, the day of worship for the sun god, was gradually adopted as the day of Christian worship in honor of the Resurrection. This false day, not sanctioned in Scripture, prevails even now.

What kind of compromises do we see entering the church today? More important, what compromises might you be making? Is it sometimes by blending truth and error?

Safeguarded by the Word

Compare John 17:15–17 and Acts 20:32. What insights do Jesus and the apostle Paul give us regarding protection from the deceptions of Satan?

The Bible is the infallible revelation of God’s will. It presents Heaven’s plan for humanity’s salvation. Since “all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God,” it is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (*2 Tim. 3:16, NKJV*). That is, “all Scripture” is inspired by God; not some parts or some parts more than others. The whole Bible must be accepted as the Word of God. Otherwise, the door is wide open for deception.

The Bible clearly reveals God’s infinite love in the light of the great controversy. It also exposes satanic delusions and reveals the devil’s deceptions. Satan hates the Word of God and has done everything possible throughout the centuries to destroy its influence.

After all, what would we know about the plan of salvation without the Bible? How much, if anything, would we understand about the birth, life, teachings, and ministry of Jesus? Without the Scriptures, would we even begin to comprehend the depth of Christ’s sacrifice, the glory of His resurrection, the power of His intercession, and the majesty of His return?

All these crucial truths are revealed, taught, and emphasized in the Word of God. It, and it alone, must be the final and ultimate standard for understanding all sacred truth.

Hence, we must fight against any and all attempts to undermine its authority or inspiration, even from those who, while professing great love of the Bible, bring doubts about it, even subtly. Tragically, especially through the inroads of modern thinking, many theologians and Christians focus so much on the human side of Scripture that the Bible becomes the word of man instead the Word of God. The Bible, they argue, is the writings of kings, shepherds, a fisherman, priests, poets, and others who shared their understandings and conceptions of God, of nature, and of reality the best that they, in their time and place, understood them.

Really, now? If this were true, why should we, living today in the twenty-first century, really care about what these people thought, much less make what they thought the foundation for our hope of eternity?

We shouldn’t.

Read Psalm 119:105, 116, 130, 133, and 160. What insights does the psalmist give us regarding the significance of God’s Word in the plan of salvation?

Human Reasoning Apart From Scripture

The Holy Spirit works through our minds. He invites us to explore the mysteries of the universe. As someone has aptly stated: “As Christians, we do not check our brains at the door of the church.” Nevertheless, the brilliance of human reasoning alone is incapable of discovering the divine truths of Scripture. Truth is not a matter of human opinion. It is a matter of divine revelation.

Read Proverbs 16:25, Judges 21:25, and Isaiah 53:6. What do these texts reveal about Satan’s strategy of deception?

One of the devil’s most effective deceptions is to lead us to believe that human reasoning, unaided by the Holy Spirit and uninformed by the Word of God, is sufficient to understand God’s will. There may be a way that seems right to us, or even to entire cultures, but it may be totally wrong in the eyes of God.

A few years ago, my wife and I decided to do some hiking in the forest near the hotel we were staying at for the night. Typically, I am fairly good at directions, and after hiking for about an hour or so taking various trails, I was quite confident that I could find our way back with little difficulty. But soon we found ourselves hopelessly lost in the forest. The sun was going down, and I feared the worst. Thankfully, we met some other hikers who knew the way. We had been at least five miles off course but near a main road. Since their car was parked nearby, they offered us a ride back to our hotel. Discovering someone who knew the way and someone who had the ability to get us back to our destination made all the difference for us.

God has not left us alone on our journey from earth to heaven. The Holy Spirit points us to the sacred Scriptures that lead us homeward. Truth and error, right and wrong, good and evil—these can be correctly understood only in light of God’s Word. That which contradicts God and His Word is error, and error is always dangerous; that which is in harmony with God is truth and goodness. How important that we make God’s Word our final arbiter of truth and morality.

Why is the human mind without the aid of the Holy Spirit incapable of discovering divine truth? Discuss the relationship between human reason and divine revelation. How does reason actually help us understand divine revelation? For example, look at Daniel 2, a prophecy that covers world history from the time of Babylon to the Second Coming. How does a prophecy like this powerfully appeal to human reason?

Battle for the Mind

Read 2 Corinthians 4:3–6. What does “whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe” (2 Cor. 4:4, NKJV) mean? How are their eyes blinded? How are eyes opened?

The Greek word for “mind” in this passage is *noema*. It literally means our perception or mental faculties. *The SDA Bible Commentary* makes an enlightening statement about this verse. “The battle between Christ and Satan is a battle for the minds of men. (Rom. 7:23, 25; 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:14, 11:3; Phil. 2:5, 4:7, 8). Satan’s principal work is to blind or darken men’s minds. He does this by keeping them from the study of God’s Word, by deranging the powers of the mind through the excesses of body and soul, by wholly occupying the mind through the things of this life, and by appealing to pride and self-exaltation.” —Volume 6, p. 854.

The lack of knowledge on the part of the lost is not because they could not know. It is because they would not know. Many have had every opportunity to know truth but chose not to believe, and Satan blinded their eyes. Satan’s kingdom is a kingdom of darkness. As *The SDA Bible Commentary* adds, “The gospel is the only means by which Satan’s diabolical schemes and deceptions can be exposed, and by which men can see the way from darkness to light.” —Volume 6, p. 854. The essence of the New Testament message is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is at the heart of the gospel and is the center of Scripture. All Scripture testifies of Him (*John 5:39*).

Read John 1:4, 5, 9 and 14. How do these verses describe Jesus? Note particularly John 1:14.

During the early centuries of the Christian church, the New Testament believers were totally committed to Christ as the One who was the light in their darkness. They were redeemed by His grace, transformed by His power, and motivated by His love. Even death could not break their bond of loyalty to Christ. They recognized the devil’s deceptions in the glorious light of the gospel. Christ has always had men and women who, by His grace, have stood courageously for His truth. In these early centuries, the light of Christ’s love, grace, and truth shone through the darkness.

Further Thought: “The same spirit of hatred and opposition to the truth has inspired the enemies of God in every age, and the same vigilance and fidelity have been required in His servants. The words of Christ to the first disciples are applicable to His followers to the close of time: ‘What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.’ Mark 13:37.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 56, 57.

In many parts of the world, especially where people have free access to the Bible, Satan has employed other means to weaken its influence. One very effective way has been through various scientific endeavors or even biblical scholarship, which sometimes takes positions that, if accepted, would undermine trust in the Word of God. For example, though the book of Daniel dates itself to more than 500 years before Christ, many Bible scholars date it, instead, to the middle of the second century B.C. They argue that it had to be written at this time; otherwise the prophet would have been accurately telling the future, and that can't happen. Therefore, they argue, Daniel was not written when it says it was but, rather, hundreds of years later. Unfortunately, this lie about the Bible is one of many that modern scholarship seeks to foist upon us. And more unfortunately, many people accept this error because, after all, Bible scholars are teaching it. No wonder Paul warns us, “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (*1 Thess. 5:21, NKJV*).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Refer to the quote in Tuesday’s study and then consider the following: How is Satan using similar methods today to subtly undermine the authority of the Scriptures?
- 2 What are our greatest safeguards against misinterpreting God’s Word?
- 3 Satan’s major attempt in the great controversy between good and evil is to malign God’s character and present Him as an authoritarian, unloving tyrant. How does the evil one attempt to do this, and what is God’s response to his lies?
- 4 The apostle Peter affirms that “no prophecy is of private interpretation” (*2 Pet. 1:20*). How can we be sure we do not distort the meaning of Scripture to achieve our own ends? Why might this be easier to do than we realize? How can we safeguard ourselves against it?

Faithful Student in Italy

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

In Italy, schoolchildren have the option of attending an hour of religion classes every week in public school. As a small girl, Sara decided to attend because she wanted to know more about the Bible.

Her classmates quickly realized that she knew the Bible well. So, when the teacher asked a question, they would say, “Sara knows the answer!”

After hearing the children say this for many months, the teacher asked Sara, “How is it that you know the Bible so well?”

“I go to the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” Sara said.

The teacher wanted to know more, so she went to church with Sara.

Sara got a new religion teacher in the sixth grade. Again she was able to answer the teacher’s questions. Impressed, the teacher invited her to give an hour-long class presentation about the Adventist Church. Sara prepared with help from her pastor and other church leaders. At the end of the presentation, classmates peppered her with questions about the seventh-day Sabbath.

Today, Sara is in high school, and her religion teacher is a nun. Once, she impressed the nun by writing a Bible verse on an exam. Other teens rarely cited the Bible. The nun asked for an explanation, and Sara told her about her faith. Afterward, the nun came to her church.

In another high school class, the teacher grew upset when Sara could not answer a question about religion in Italy. Sara explained that she did not know because she was not a member of Italy’s largest denomination. The teacher asked several questions and invited Sara to give the class a lesson about the Adventist Church. Sara’s presentation pleased the teacher, and she said, “It is wonderful to learn about another faith in our class.”

The next year, however, Sara had a Saturday class from the same teacher. The teacher pressured Sara to attend, and when she didn’t, teased her. “Please come to school,” she said. “We won’t tell anyone that you came.” Week after week, she mocked Sara. “I also could stay home on Saturdays,” she said. “It would be better than coming to school.”

To Sara’s surprise, her classmates began to defend her to the teacher.

Then one Sabbath, when Sara was in church, the teacher praised her to the class. “Even though Sara is only here half the time, she gets better marks than the rest of you,” she said.

Sara believes God has blessed her for being open about her faith.

“I never have hidden my faith from my classmates,” she told Adventist Mission. “My classmates respect me and know my faith is serious for me.”

This mission story illustrates Spiritual Growth Objective No. 7 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “I Will Go” strategic plan: “To help youth and young adults place God first.” For more information, go to the website: IWillGo2020.org.