

Sabbath School Lesson #11 – False Teachers – 3-9 June 2017

Christ warned that there will be false teachers. The apostle Peter echoes this warning. “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (2 Peter 2:19).

Two grave errors arise from a failure properly to discriminate between pure religion and the practices of many who profess religion. First, Infidels conclude that Christianity is but little in advance of many forms of heathenism. Judging Christianity by false teachers thereof, they lose sight of the fact that there is such a thing as “pure religion.” Second, Believers are in danger of thinking that whatever has been done by “the church” must of necessity be in harmony with religion. This second error is as bad as the first, for in either case the person will fall far short of the true standard. To know what true religion is, we must look only at the Word of God and the life of Jesus Christ as therein portrayed. Of all those who have stood this earth, Christ alone had no sin; in Him religion was revealed pure and undefiled.

There have been men “of whom the world was not worthy” (Hebrews 11:38), and yet the record of their lives is not altogether perfect. If we should take for a model the most perfect mortal, we should be led into error; how much greater, then, must be our danger, if we follow those whose lives were far below the standard of pure and undefiled religion. Of course Christians should not think of taking the course of irreligious people as models for their own lives; but a chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and since the conscientious, people in the professed churches, is evident that whosoever follows “the church” instead of Christ will be led into error. That the professed church of Christ has always had in it elements of corruption which would make it an unsafe guide, is as evident as is the fact that Christ has a church which is “enfeebled and defective, needing constantly to be warned and counseled” {7T 16.4} composed of frail, erring mortals. Christ alone, not “the church,” is our safe guide.

If we go back to the first followers of Christ, we find one who was so utterly base as to sell his Lord for a paltry sum of money. Naturally avaricious, Judas yielded little by little to the temptations of Satan, who always attacks men on the side of their natural inclination, until the devil finally had complete control of him; yet all this time he was numbered among the followers of Christ. But the weakness of the early disciples was not confined to Judas. They were all men, and consequently were liable to err even when with full of zeal for the Master. James and John wished to call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans, because these people were not willing to receive Christ. Jesus rebuked His rash followers, saying, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of” (see Luke 9:51-56). Peter, who was so often reproved by Jesus for his hasty spirit, at one time denied his Lord with oaths; and, still later, he used dissimulation to such a degree that Paul was forced to withstand him to the face (Galatians 2:11-14). Even the upright Barnabas was carried away with the dissimulation, which met with such a stern rebuke from Paul. And later these two yoke-fellows who had laboured together under the direction of Heaven, showed that they were still human, by falling into so sharp a contention that they were obliged to separate (Acts 15:36-41).

If among the twelve there was one who had a devil, why wonder that false teachers have continually corrupted the church by their presence? Said the apostle Peter, in his letter to the church: “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you; whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Paul in his address to the elders of the church at Ephesus, said: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30). The testimony of both Peter and Paul show that the inspired apostles knew that there would be not only imperfect, erring members in the church, but also false teachers, who, like Judas, would deny the Lord that bought them. Among the

elders of the church, there were to arise unprincipled men who would bring in “damnable heresies.” The professed church, after the days of apostles, was filled with the abominations.

Even in the days of the apostles, while their straight testimony was being delivered, this spirit of corruption crept into the church. To the Thessalonians Paul wrote that long before Christ’s second advent there would come a “falling away,” and that the “man of sin” would be revealed, sitting in the temple of God, virtually professing to be God, and opposing all that pertains to God and his true worship, and then he added that “the mystery of iniquity doth already work” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-7). Paul knew that even in the churches of his own planting there were corrupt elements that would eventually contaminate the whole body.

The church at Corinth was raised up by the personal labours of Paul, yet he was obliged to reprove the members for the spirit of contention and division (1 Corinthians 1:11-13), which was carried so far that they went to law with one another in the heathen courts (1 Corinthians 6:6-8). So little spiritual discernment did they have, that they made the Lord’s Supper an occasion for feasting and drunkenness (1 Corinthians 11:17-22), and they tolerated incest of a kind that was disapproved even by the licentious heathen (1 Corinthians 5:1-2), and did not feel that for it they had any cause for shame. In Paul’s second letter to Timothy we find mention of one of the “damnable heresies” which were brought into the church. Says Paul: “But shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some” (2 Timothy 2:16-18). A single passage in Paul’s letter to the churches in Galatia shows the danger to which all the converts from among the heathen were exposed. Said he: “Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain” (Galatians 4:8-11). Of course the Galatians, in common with all heathen, were given to immoral practices and senseless ceremonies before their conversion. And as men when they lose their faith and love, begin to go back to the things to which they were addicted before conversion, so the Galatians were on the point of going back to the “weak and beggarly elements” to which they formerly were in bondage. And they had gone so far back as to “observe days, and months, and times [Deuteronomy 18:10], and years,” and Paul feared that his labour for them had all been thrown away.

Still later the apostle John wrote: “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2 John 7). Again he wrote to the well-beloved Gaius: “I wrote unto the church; but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words; and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church” (3 John 9-10). Here was a man in the church setting himself in direct opposition to the apostle John. He was not a private member, but one who had degree of preeminence that he loved, that he could cause people to be cast out of the church. This leader in the church refused to receive the instruction that the apostle John had written, and cast out of the church those who were willing to receive it. Not content with this, he railed against the inspired servant of the Lord. Surely it cannot with reason be claimed that “the church,” even in the apostolic age, ought to be taken as a model for us.

Jude thought it necessary to exhort the faithful to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, and the following is the reason: “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). Further on he brings this fearful charge against these men: “But these speak evil of those things which they know not; but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves” (Jude 10). And the apostle plainly states that bribery was practiced in the church: “These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage” (verse 16). These passages make prominent that false teachers were always in the church. Christ is our model; “the church” is not a model for us.