

# THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

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We can understand how war breaks out in this dark, sinful world; but how could there be “war in heaven”? (Rev. 12:7) Heaven is a perfect place! Who started it?

The Bible says clearly that sin originated with Lucifer, the highest of the angels (Eze. 28:12-15; Isa. 14:12-14). He sought to spread rebellion. And many angels joined him (“the third part,” Rev. 12:4). But who started the conflict that resulted in “the great dragon, . . . the Devil, and Satan [being] . . . cast out”?

A very wise writer says that Lucifer’s new idea of “the . . . exaltation of self, contrary to the Creator’s plan, awakened forebodings of evil in minds to whom God’s glory was supreme” (GC 494). This quiet, clever, secret “exaltation of self” would have gone on and on had it not been that some “minds” loyal to God were “awakened” to oppose it. They were the ones who started the “war in heaven”! They were not content to let this underhanded work proceed unopposed.

Our text seems clear: “And there was war in heaven: Michael and His angels fought against the dragon [that is, took the initiative]; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven” (Rev. 12:7, 8). There is no suggestion that literal swords or guns were used. Two of three “parts” of the angels thought through the clever lies of Lucifer and

his supporting angels, and rejected them; thus “their place” was no more “found . . . in heaven.” Today the Holy Spirit still takes the initiative in opposing evil. Thank God! And we should cooperate with Him and stop opposing His initiatives.

Satan was “cast out into the earth” because our first parents welcomed him (Gen. 3). Now the cosmic controversy continues here until “our brethren . . . overcome him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb,” “and by the word of their testimony” (two things!), and “love not their lives unto the death” (vss. 9-12). When among them that original “exaltation of self” is renounced, the final victory will come. “Therefore rejoice, ye heavens.” Why? Be “glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb is come” (19:6, 7). *At last!*

We are ready enough to believe that we ourselves are on trial before the universe, desperately in need of vindication. *Our* honor is obviously in doubt, *our* existence involved in insecurity.

But to many it’s a revolutionary thought that the character of God is on trial. How can *His* honor be in jeopardy? Why should *He* need vindication?

Perplexity follows the suggestion that God may be in the kind of difficulty that a vindication would relieve. How can the Infinite One know any limitation or frustration? Supposing that someone were foolhardy enough to oppose or to malign Him, why would He bother to give the matter a second thought? Is He not infinitely and eternally secure, the invincible Heavyweight Champion of the universe? Any opponent soon enough gets knocked out. Rebellion on the part of angels and men is

simple enough to exterminate by merely wiping them out of existence; and were it not for the fact that He condescends to love fallen man, it is assumed that He would not hesitate to destroy them once He can discriminate between the incorrigible and the cooperative ones.

The issues of the plan of salvation are thus purely man-centered; and from our own viewpoint, exclusively self-oriented. We have only ourselves and our fellow-sinners to think about. "Make certain your own soul's salvation, preach to others, and that's it!" is the general idea. God needs nothing from you. Eliphaz asks: "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous?" Job 22:2, 3.

There are aspects of this position that doubtless tend toward passivity or Christian *laissez faire*.

An opposite extreme is the idea that God is an impotent weakling sitting on an archaic throne "ruling" an empire that has ceased to exist. Driven into a corner by the successful rebellion fomented by His highest minion, Lucifer. He cowers helplessly while awaiting "salvation" from His erstwhile rebellious children. Not until they "vote" Him in again can He reassert the authority of His ancient majesty. There seems in the foreseeable future little likelihood of God being reinstated into sovereignty by a unanimous vote of His rebellious children. Unless something unprecedented happens, it would appear as though God has "had it." There are aspects of this view that doubtless tend toward

panic and fanaticism. Does the truth lie somewhere between these two extremes?

What has made the vindication of God necessary? A clever, intelligent enemy has arisen within the universe who has challenged Him. The following are among the charges and insinuations of accusation implicit in Lucifer's rebellion; the charges are echoed from the sinful heart of man:

1. God is basically selfish. "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes" (Psalm 50:21).

"[Satan] had accused God of seeking merely the exaltation of Himself in requiring submission and obedience from his creatures, and had declared that while the Creator exacted self-denial from all others, He Himself practiced no self-denial and made no sacrifice" (GC 502; RH, Feb. 18, 1890).

2. God's law is unjust because it requires an obedience impossible to yield. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). 5BC 1129, 1131.

3. The divine government is responsible for the rebellion. "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20). Why have you, God, made me sinful? You created me with an inherent flaw. "The aim of the great rebel has ever been to justify himself and to prove the divine government responsible for the rebellion" (GC 670, 499).

4. Self-denial is impossible and therefore not essential for the human family. “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19). “The victory gained at His death on Calvary broke forever the accusing power of Satan over the universe and silenced his charges that *self-denial was impossible with God* and therefore not essential in the human family” (1SM 341; MS 50, 1900).

5. Angels (and man) need only do what they think is right, without the restraint of law. “He [the rebel] reiterated his claim that angels needed no control, but should be left to follow their own will, which would ever guide them right. He denounced the divine statutes as a restriction of their liberty, and declared that it was his purpose to secure the abolition of law; that, freed from this restraint, the hosts of heaven might enter upon a more exalted, more glorious state of existence. . . .

“Satan has continued with men the same policy which he pursued with the angels” (GC 499, 500).

6. God’s unjust restrictions led to man’s fall in Eden. “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). “By the same misrepresentation of the character of God as he had practiced in heaven, Satan induced man to sin. And having succeeded thus far, he declared that God’s unjust restrictions had led to man’s fall, as they had led to his own rebellion” (GC 500).

7. The Father and the Son were the enemies of the angels, and of man, and Lucifer was their friend.

“. . . Angels became disaffected. The insinuations of Satan took effect, and they really came to believe that the Father and the Son were their enemies and that Satan was their benefactor” (3T 328).

8. It is impossible for fallen man to obey the divine law, or to resist temptation (PP 88). “He [Satan] declares that it is impossible for us to obey its precepts” (DA 24; Rom. 8:7).

9. The sins of the professed people of God are an evidence that the plan of salvation is in vain, and that God’s efforts at self-vindication are futile. Isa. 43:24; Rev. 3:14-21.

“If those who hide and excuse their faults could see how Satan exults over them, how he taunts Christ and holy angels with their course, they would make haste to confess” (GC 489).

“The reason that we carelessly indulge in sin is that we do not see Jesus. We would not lightly regard sin, did we appreciate the fact that sin wounds our Lord” (YI, Feb. 10, 1898).

“The scenes which took place at that meeting made the God of heaven ashamed to call those who took part in them His brethren” (*Special Testimony to the RH Office*, 1896, pp. 16, 17).

“Sin on the part of the messenger of God would cause Satan to rejoice” (Letter 0’19 [?], 1892).

“Our Lord is put to shame by those who claim to serve Him, but who misrepresent His character” (DA 438, 439).

“The reproach of the disciple’s sin is cast upon Christ. It causes Satan to triumph, and wavering souls to stumble” (DA 811).

God's justice and righteousness are in doubt. Why has God presumed to pass by transgression for 4000 years up to the time of the cross? The death of animals could be no payment for sin; but He has dared to forgive sinners and has even translated or resurrected some like Enoch, Elijah and Moses. (cf. Rom. 3:25, 26).

Man has become deeply involved. Sin lies in the entertainment and cherishing of the apparently plausible accusations of Satan. Fear dictates to man a forced submission to God, while his inner heart—often well beyond man's full consciousness—mulls over what appear to be serious wrongs and inconsistencies in the character and behavior of God.

Is your human heart reconciled to God? Are you alert to realize that your natural human heart "is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can be" except through the atonement of Christ? Do you still wrestle with a lingering sense that somehow you must make yourself good before He can be reconciled to you, and before He can really accept you and respect you? Do you have that nagging feeling that He cannot truly be your Friend until you are worthy? While you are sitting in the pigsty, do you wish you had a Father who would forgive and accept the prodigal? If so, you need to know about the Day of Atonement; as never before in world history the world's attention is directed now to the atoning sacrifice of Christ where "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. . . .

We beseech you in Christ's stead, be YE reconciled to God"! (2 Cor. 5:19, 20). But you CAN'T "be" unless you first believe He is reconciled to you! So, "spend a thoughtful hour" contemplating the cross where that reconciliation was accomplished.

"It'll never happen," say some. "Sin is so strong, so deeply rooted in human nature, that even God's grace can't conquer it!" You may actually hear this being taught in your church. If so, it's propaganda straight from the headquarters of God's enemy in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. It's the idea that sin "remains" forever in human hearts, but in those who believe and obey, it does not "reign." It's a euphemism that masks an accommodation with sin provided it is subtle enough to be concealed from conscious knowledge. The outward life is amended and the grosser forms of sin are indeed laid aside; but the inward spiritual devotion to self is still assumed to be unconquerable. Along with this philosophy is the idea that the church as a church body will never "overcome" or repent in response to Christ's command in Rev. 3:19. The great controversy "war" becomes a stalemate, and as long as "the economy is great!" such church members are content for it to go on as a stalemate forever; life here is too much fun to think of a time of trouble coming. Jesus described it as the idea of "take thine ease, eat, drink [soda pop], and be merry" for "you have much goods laid up" ("the economy is good!") (Lk 12:19).

But wait! The Holy Spirit is stepping on to the stage, and is getting serious about "overcoming even as [Christ] overcame" (Rev. 3:21). He is

arousing millions to some very sober thinking. Quietly but surely, behind the scenes of the world's confusion, He is working to prepare a people who respond positively to that much more abounding grace that conquers the most abounding sin that the devil can invent (see Rom 5:20). Good News!

Was Job a bad man? God said of him: "There is none like [My servant Job] in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God and spits out evil" (1:8). And God repeated that in 2:3. Yet we find Job wanting to take God into court and put Him on trial! The GNB translation of Job is excellent: "If [God] lets me speak, I can't believe He would listen to me. He sends storms to batter and bruise me, without any reason at all. . . All He has done makes me bitter. Should I try force? Try force on God? Should I take Him to court? Who would make Him go? I am innocent and faithful, but . . . everything I say seems to condemn me. I am innocent, but I no longer care. . . Innocent or guilty, God will destroy us. When an innocent man suddenly dies, God laughs. God gave the world to the wicked. He made all the judges blind. And if God didn't do it, who did?" (9:14-24). And THAT was "a perfect and an upright man"? More: "You know that I am not guilty, that no one can save me from You. Your hands formed and shaped me, and now those same hands destroy me. Remember that You made me from clay; are You going to crush me back to dust? . . . You hunt me down like a lion, You even work miracles to hurt me. . . Why, God, did You let me be born? . . . Leave me alone! Let me enjoy the time I have left" (Job 10). "A perfect and an

upright man"? YES, God said so; and Job wanted to take God to court for trial!! But that made God happy. (At the end, He again upheld Job, 42:7-9). God loves to be taken into "court" so justice CAN be done! Job's problem was not that he had rebelled against God; he had rebelled against Satan—and that's what made God proud of him. Job just hadn't known who was who; it was a simple case of mistaken identity. He really wanted to haul Satan into court; his whole soul was enlisted in "the great controversy between Christ and Satan" and he was totally on God's side. There are billions today in Job's shoes; they don't know who's who in "the great controversy." They await that message and that Voice from heaven when the earth will be "lightened with the glory" of "the everlasting gospel" at last made totally clear (Rev. 18:1-4).

Do you like to fight battles? Or do you like to run away from them? I meet many wonderful Christian people, members of the church, who want peace so much that they refuse to get down in the arena where battles for the Lord must be fought. To tell the truth, they'd rather watch TV than study for themselves to know the truth about the issues in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. But Paul says in 1 Tim. 6:12, "Fight the good fight of faith," and Jude says (vs. 3) that we "should contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," for there are "certain men crept in unawares" who seek to corrupt that faith. And Jesus tells us quite clearly, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at

variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Mt. 10:34-36).

Wow! Is this what it means to follow Christ? "But," says someone, "surely this doesn't apply to conflicts WITHIN the church!?? The world is full of controversy; I go to church so I can find a place of rest and peace!" Well, I must tell the truth. Revelation 12:17 says that the dragon, the devil, in these last days, is "wroth" with the true church, and has gone to make war with the remnant church, where his most fearful strategy is to make war within the church against the pure, true gospel of Jesus. If Satan can corrupt THAT, he hopes yet to win the war against Christ. So Peter's advice is exactly what we need today: "Be sober, be vigilant." "Resist" him "steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet. 5:8). But please be sure that you have your wits about you; that word "sober" means to think carefully lest you end up "resisting" the true work of the Holy Spirit! If you do THAT, you've crossed that line beyond which repentance is impossible. The stakes in the great controversy are high; the only place where you can avoid the battle is the grave. And please don't choose to go there! Get on your knees; study; learn; stay awake; "watch"; and stand "for the right though the heavens fall," says one wise writer.

After I was baptized I wanted to understand "the sanctuary." How does one make sense of the offerings and ceremonies in Leviticus? What do the rituals mean, "candlesticks," altars, "bread" baked fresh every Sabbath morning, those two

apartments—one "Holy" and the other "Most Holy," the incense, the solemn Day of Atonement once a year? Why study all this when it came to an end when Christ was crucified? Is it an exercise in futility?

Then I "discovered" the Book of Revelation—God wants us to understand it TODAY. The Savior of the world is "revealed" in history. It emerges out of the fog as leading straight to a grand climax—His second coming. The final judgment must be intensely interesting, when all wrongs will be made right, there is a grand victory of righteousness over sin, "the Lamb" triumphing in His "great controversy" with Satan. This must be intensely interesting.

And there in the middle of the Book of Revelation suddenly appears the real "sanctuary" in heaven where Jesus Christ ministers as our High Priest, fighting His battle with Satan. The climax comes in chapter 11:15-19 where the great "door" into the Most Holy Apartment is flung open and we can peer into "the ark of the covenant"—something the world could never see before,—"the finishing of the mystery of God" (10:7). Here is a climactic change in heaven's administration.

All of Christ's resources are today expended in preparing a people for translation at His coming, a change from His previous High Priestly ministry (which was preparing people for death). The cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven requires first the cleansing of the hearts of God's people on earth—a work going on behind the scenes just now.

Now the sanctuary truth comes alive!

Millions of Christians around the world are studying about “the Origin of Sin.” Not much Good News there; but they are also studying about the “eradication of sin,” and that is Good News. The very first page of the NT declares that Jesus came to “save His people FROM their sins” (not IN them; Mt. 1:21). God cannot eradicate sin from His universe until first He eradicates it from human hearts. That is where sin has taken root; the human heart is the last lair where the dragon of sin lurks. Sin’s roots go down to our toes. Can sin be overcome, eradicated? The outcome of the great controversy between Christ and Satan depends on the answer. Some say that sin itself will never be conquered until Christ comes the second time, zaps His saints and gives them holy flesh, removing temptation from them, the implication being that as long as you and I have our “sinful flesh,” sin will still win out. But the Bible is clear: (1) Rom. 6:13, 14, even though we still have sinful flesh or sinful nature, “sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” (2) Rom. 5:20, “grace did much more abound” than “sin abounded.” In other words, the idea is clear: grace is stronger than sin. If that is not true, the great controversy must end in defeat for God. (3) 2 Cor. 5:14, 15, this grace of God operates through the revelation of the love of God (*agape*). Therefore, “the *agape* of Christ constraineth us . . . henceforth” to live not unto self, but “unto Him” who died for us and rose again.

The love of self is the very essence of sin, its quintessential element that filled Lucifer’s heart in

the beginning and which here at the every end of time forces the “church of the Laodiceans” to be lukewarm in heart. (4) Jn. 12:31-33, not only did Christ conquer the problem of sin by His sinless life and His sacrifice on the cross. In order for the great controversy to come to an end, He must have a people whose faith demonstrates that such *agape* will “constrain” them also to “overcome even as [He] overcame” (Rev. 3:21). (5) The bright picture at the end of the Bible is Heaven’s spotlight on a group who stand on “a sea of glass mingled with fire” who have “gotten the victory” over sin, “having the harps of God.” That wasn’t accomplished by zapping them with sinless flesh, but by giving them grace to “overcome” in sinful flesh.

Yes, there is indeed a “great controversy between Christ and Satan.” And those who believe in Christ believe that He will win, in the end. This is called “the blessed hope” (Tit. 2:13).

Can human beings help Him win that great controversy?

Many will say, “No, God is sovereign; He is almighty; He is the Captain on this ship; we are only passengers.” And in one sense that is true.

But there is another truth that is begging for recognition: the long delay in finishing the great controversy is not God’s fault, but the fault of His people who have delayed His will. When one compares Christ’s message to “the angel of the church of the Laodiceans” in Revelation 3:14-21 with ch. 19:1-8, it becomes readily apparent that the Bride of the Lamb should have “made herself ready” long ago.

The great controversy cannot be finally concluded until she does make herself ready, because you can't have a marriage without a bride having made herself ready!

Yes, Christ needs the cooperation of His people, because “the Head cannot say to the feet, I have no need of you” (compare 1 Cor. 12:21). One’s feet are very lowly in comparison with one’s head; but no one wants to lose them.

The time must come when not only is Satan defeated at Christ’s cross, but Christ’s people must also defeat him. “Our brethren . . . overcame him [Satan] by the by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony” (Rev. 12:11). Only then can the final chorus of rejoicing break out in heaven (vs. 12).

You are important; all Heaven is watching you on their TV cameras. And the Savior’s “much more abounding grace” is GIVEN to you, not merely offered. Rejoice and thank God for the privilege of having an important part in the final battle of the great controversy.