

Atonement and the Cross of Christ

Atonement and Universal Harmony

Lesson #13 for December 27, 2008

Scriptures: Daniel 7:9-14,22; 8:13,14; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 15:51-54; Hebrews 9:23; Revelation 20:1-4,11-15; 22:3-6,11.

1. This lesson discusses the final events of earth's history, the final end of sin and sinners, the millennium, and the wonderful harmony and peace that will exist throughout the universe after sin is eliminated.
2. Right now, human beings are making the choices that will determine their final fate at the end of earth's history. There will only be two possible choices. Will we continue to choose our selfish course following the example of Satan, or will we choose to follow God's guidance in the example of Jesus Christ? If we choose to follow Satan and his selfish kingdom, we will be slowly transformed to become like him. By contrast, if we choose to behold the life and example of Jesus, we will be slowly transformed into His likeness and be prepared to live with Him for eternity. When everyone has made up his own mind, there will be no reason for God to wait any longer, and then, Jesus will come the second time. Because this final step in the eradication of evil is so important to the harmony of the universe for the rest of eternity, God will take a thousand years (the millennium) to make sure that every single being sees the superiority of His way, and each reconfirms his choice for it, thus, deciding his own fate.

We are living in the days of the final events of earth's history. What will your guardian angel say or think when your name and your case comes up in the courts of heaven. God already knows exactly how things are going to work out, but the angels do not. God who always runs an open government allows anyone who has questions to raise them. Actually, there are going to be three judgments that will take place.

The first is the "pre-advent judgment" which is going on right now. It provides an opportunity for the inhabitants of the entire universe to look over our records and ask their questions before we show up.

The second judgment is that spoken of in 1 Corinthians 6:1-3 and Revelation 20 when the "saints" "sit on thrones" in heaven and judge angels and humans. That will be our opportunity to clear up any questions that we have.

The third judgment will take place at the third coming when all the wicked will also be given the opportunity to see—through the panoramic presentation of the great controversy—what part each of them has played in the conflict. When that final judgment is finished, "every knee will bow [including Satan] and every tongue will confess" that Jesus is Lord. (Philippians 2:10,11) That is what must happen before God can allow the whole "sin problem" to come to an end and the great controversy to be finished.

3. While choosing the correct side in the great controversy is an all-or-nothing choice for human beings, God is also being judged in the great controversy. Remember that sin began where it will end—in the "throne room of heaven." Every being in the entire universe—even Satan himself—will fall on his knees and acknowledge that God's way was, and is, best. (Isaiah 45:22,23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10,11) **What will it take to get Satan to "fall on his knees" and admit that God was right?** Do you remember when the O.J. Simpson trial was going on in Los Angeles? Months were spent looking at all sorts of trivial bits of evidence.

Finally, he was acquitted! If God had been conducting that trial, He would simply have pulled up the “3D video” of the actual events and allowed everyone to see exactly who did what and why. (Remember that God will also be able to show everyone’s motives!) When God is finished, there will not be any doubt in anyone’s mind! When that happens, God can safely “close the books” on sin and restore universal harmony by the elimination of sin. The truth about us and the deadliness of sin will be revealed as God withdraws Himself from sinners and allows them to reap the natural consequence of their own behavior. The evidence will be so compelling that not even Satan will be able to resist the overwhelming conviction that God is—and always was—right. We will see every detail of crucifixion weekend. There will be no “blackout” period! We will be able to see exactly the part that God played, that Satan played, and what every being did in that conflict. Even those who are “outside the city” will agree that they would not be comfortable living inside the city with God. Those who are inside will be so thankful that they are there.

4. At the same time, while God and His faithful children may weep over the destruction of God’s wicked children, they will rejoice at the elimination of sin and the restoration of eternal peace and harmony. There is no good reason for a single person to die. God will open the “books” of heaven and the evidence will be seen—fully and completely vindicating God’s judgment and His handling of the great controversy.
5. How long does God need to take to move human history from where we are now to that point?

You will not be able to say that He will come in one, two, or five years, neither are you to put off His coming by stating that it may not be for ten or twenty years. . . . We are not to know the definite time either for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for the coming of Christ.—*Review and Herald*, March 22, 1892. {*Ev* 221.1; *1SM* 189.2; *LDE* 33.2; *Mar* 136.1; *1888* 959.3, compare *2SM* 113.3; *17MR* 17.2}

It does not need to take a long time! People are becoming more and more “settled” into their habits and customs.

6. But before the wicked perish at the third coming, the righteous will be invited to join God in heaven at the second coming. What actually happens at the second coming? Before God can come and claim His people, they must be adequately prepared. A very special group of people will exist at the end of time. Revelation 7 and 14 describe them by the symbolic number, 144,000. Who are those people and what do we know about them? Here are John’s and Ellen White’s words about them: (*Great Controversy* 648-649)

1) [They] have “gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name.”

2) They...were redeemed from among men.

3) They sing “a new [649] song” . . . the song of Moses and the Lamb—a song of deliverance. . . the song of their experience—an experience such as no other company have ever had. [For the first time in any of their lives, the children of Israel realized that they were free and beyond the reach of Pharaoh.]

4) These, having been translated from the earth, from among the living, are counted as “the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb.” Revelation 15:2,3; 14:1-5.

5) “These are they which came out of great tribulation;” they have passed

through the time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation; they have endured the anguish of the time of Jacob's trouble.

6) They have stood without an intercessor through the final outpouring of God's judgments.

7) But they have been delivered, for they have "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." "In their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault" before God. "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them."

8) They have seen the earth wasted with famine and pestilence, the sun having power to scorch men with great heat, and they themselves have endured suffering, hunger, and thirst.... (Revelation 7:14-17)

7. When God has a group of people on planet Earth that meet the criteria to be members of the 144,000, then He can come and "collect" them and take them to heaven. What changes at that point? 1) They will receive new, transformed, immortal bodies. (1 Corinthians 15:53) 2) As a result of going to heaven, they will be permanently removed from the "atmosphere of sin." 3) From that point on, they will have permanent, unhindered access to all heavenly beings including all three Members of the Godhead. Through that unhindered access, they will discover what is meant by that marvelous expression, "God is love." (1 John 4:8,16) 4) There will be a reunion such as has never occurred in the history of the universe prior to that time. Not only will God's family be restored to Him, but each one will begin to experience the harmony and peace that were present in heaven before Satan rebelled. Imagine an entire universe with no conflict! Unfortunately, this "pie in the sky by and by" promise is not appealing to many in our "instant gratification" society!

8. But right now, right here on planet Earth, God is willing to offer us the first phases of the harmony that will result if we live according to His plan.

9. While living through the worst events in this earth's history, the 144,000 will stand in opposition to Satan's almost universal "evangelistic campaign," (Revelation 13:3,4,7,8; notice that these verses suggest that almost the entire world will be worshiping the "dragon"—Satan) and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the 144,000 will face the Devil himself and refuse to give up the relationship they have with their God. Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, communists, atheists, agnostics, and evolutionists will all proclaim that Satan is the Messiah!

Satan will do his best to destroy God's people, but he will not be able to kill them. God will protect them. But while trying to kill God's people, Satan will kill millions of "his own" people. If you read Revelation 7:4,9, you will notice that there seem to be two groups of people—the 144,000 and another enormous group too numerous to count. That second group will include those who have died "serving" Christ.

There will also be two special resurrections: 1) Many of those who have been God's worst enemies, like those who condemned Jesus, and 2) Those who have been especially faithful to God in very hard times, including many martyrs.

10. During the millennium two important things will take place: 1) God's people redeemed from this earth will have an opportunity to review all the heavenly records to see why some have been saved and others have been lost. The evidence will speak for itself, and God's judgment

will be vindicated. No one will ever again question God's righteousness. In effect, the righteous will be given positions of judgment. (1 Corinthians 4:5; 6:3; Revelation 20:1-4) When the millennium is over, the righteous will praise and honor the name of God because they will agree that every one of His judgments is correct. 2) Satan and his evil angels will be forced to remain on this desolate planet for a thousand years to "reflect" on what they have caused by their rebellion against God. Though they may not yet be quite ready to admit it, they are convinced that they are the ones who were wrong and who made mistakes. They will be forced to review in their own minds their decline and fall from being holy angels in heaven to being demons here on earth. (Ephesians 6:12; Revelation 12:7-12; *Patriarchs and Prophets* pp. 33-43)

These evil angels will be able to recall all of the events and all the choices that they have made since the time when they lived in perfect peace and harmony in God's very presence all the way down to when they will be condemned and "chained" to this earth awaiting their destruction! (Revelation 20)

The one thing that the Bible does not spell out is exactly what sin does to people. Maybe God figures we have enough examples surrounding us so that He does not need to spell it out!

11. Everything about God's plan to deal with the rebellion of Satan will be seen to be right. Nothing will be discovered that could have been done for the benefit of Satan or human beings that God has not done—within the limitations of freedom, the principle of His government.
12. The list of names that God has written in the "book of the living" will be seen to be correct. (Revelation 20:11-15; 22:3-6) God's judgments of humans will be shown to be exactly correct, and our judgment of God will be shown to be correct.
13. **Satan sees that his voluntary rebellion has unfitted him for heaven. He has trained his powers to war against God; the purity, peace, and harmony of heaven would be to him supreme torture. [If Satan were allowed to return to heaven, he would just start the great controversy all over again!] His accusations against the mercy and justice of God are now silenced. The reproach which he has endeavored to cast upon Jehovah rests wholly upon himself. And now Satan bows down and confesses the justice of his sentence. . . . [Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10,11] {GC 670.2}**

Every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy has now been made plain. The results of rebellion, the fruits of setting aside the divine statutes, have been laid open to the view of all created intelligences. **[Every one of God's children, both the righteous and sinners, will agree that God's way was right from the beginning.] The working out of Satan's rule in contrast with the government of God has been presented to the whole universe. Satan's own works have condemned him. God's wisdom, His justice, and His goodness stand fully vindicated.** It is seen that all His dealings in the great controversy have been conducted [671] with respect to the eternal good of His people and the good of all the worlds that He has created. [God has never asked us to do or believe anything that is not ultimately for our best good.] "All Thy works shall praise Thee, O Lord; and Thy saints shall bless Thee." Psalm 145:10. **The history of sin [that is, the**

evidence that God's way is always the best way] will stand to all eternity as a witness that with the existence of God's law is bound up the happiness of all the beings He has created. [Many Christians believe that God is somehow going to wipe out all memory of sin at the second coming. Don't believe it. If He did, we would be right back where we were before the great controversy began! Suppose that someone, perhaps recently created some billion years into the future, should ask the question, "Why do we always have to do things God's way?" God will just ask him to sit down and "watch" the history of this planet. If that does not convince him, God could ask all of us if it is all right for Him to step back and let that person reap the natural results of his rebellious choice—eternal separation from God which results in that person ceasing to exist. Every one of us would agree. There is no reason to go through this whole "mess" again. That is why sin will never rise again.] With all the facts of the great controversy in view, the whole universe, both loyal and rebellious, with one accord declare: "Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." [Revelation 15:3] {GC 670.3}

Notwithstanding that Satan has been constrained to acknowledge God's justice and to bow to the supremacy of Christ, his character remains unchanged. The spirit of rebellion, like a mighty torrent, again bursts forth. Filled with frenzy, he determines not to yield the great controversy. The time has come for a last desperate struggle against the King [672] of heaven. He rushes into the midst of his subjects and endeavors to inspire them with his own fury and arouse them to instant battle. But of all the countless millions whom he has allured into rebellion, there are none [not even his own angels] now to acknowledge his supremacy. His power is at an end. The wicked are filled with the same hatred of God that inspires Satan; but they see that their case is hopeless, that they cannot prevail against Jehovah. Their rage is kindled against Satan and those who have been his agents in deception, and with the fury of demons they turn upon them.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 670-672.

14. God's love will have triumphed. We need to study this, to understand it, to clearly recognize the issues that were involved, and to firmly and permanently make our choice to be on God's side in the great controversy. (*Desire of Ages* p. 83)
15. Considering what God has to offer in heaven and the "earth made new," why would anyone want to choose anything else?

To dwell forever in this home of the blest, to bear in soul, body, and spirit, not the dark traces of sin and the curse, but the perfect likeness of our Creator, and through ceaseless ages to advance in wisdom, in knowledge and holiness, ever exploring new fields of thought, ever finding new wonders and new glories, ever increasing in capacity to know and to enjoy and to love, and knowing that there is still beyond us joy and love and wisdom infinite,—such is the object to which the Christian hope is pointing, . . .—Ellen G. White, {*RH*, July 11, 1882 par. 21; *CT* 55.2; *AG* 363.6; *HP* 367.4; *Mar* 324.3; *ML* 361.3; *HL* 299; compare *GC* 677; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 990.

16. If the redeemed and the angels are going to spend profitable time reviewing the mystery of salvation for the rest of eternity, shouldn't we find profit in doing so now? God invites us to look at our lives and to consider what He is willing to do for us.
17. **The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise of bliss. All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God. The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. . . The death of Christ on the cross of Calvary is our only hope in this world, and it will be our theme in the world to come. Oh, we do not comprehend the value of the atonement! If we did, we would talk more about it.**—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, December 30, 1889, par. 4; *5BC* 1132.8,9; *TA* 205.3.
18. God is calling us. He is offering us a “retirement package” that is “out of this world”! He gives us the opportunity to spend eternity with the most wonderful people in the universe. All He asks us to do is to choose His side in the great controversy, to become fully convinced of the rightness of His way of government, and to stand faithful to Him through the final events of this earth's history. Are we ready? Are you ready?

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