

The Sanctuary

The Cosmic Conflict Over God's Character

Lesson #12 for December 21, 2013

Scriptures: Ezekiel 28:12-17; 36:20-27; Isaiah 14:12-15; Job 1:6-12; Zechariah 3:1-5; 1 John 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:8.

1. The cosmic conflict—sometimes called the great controversy over God's character and government—is a theme that pervades Scripture. Fortunately for us as Seventh-day Adventists, Ellen White has taken up this theme and expanded on it by pointing out places in Scripture that focus on it. As a result, she wrote her five most important books—the *Conflict of the Ages* series: *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Prophets and Kings*, *The Desire of Ages*, *Acts of the Apostles*, and *The Great Controversy*.
2. Almost every religion and even many secular books talk about a conflict between good and evil. Many religions have multiple gods, some of whom are good and some of whom are evil. The followers pray to the good gods to get their blessing and try to appease the evil gods to avoid their judgments or punishment. But, the Jews first, then Christians, and then Muslims became great monotheistic religions, believing that there is only one God. And what is that God like? Unfortunately, many ideas and teachings even of these monotheistic religions have implied that God is angry and must be appeased.
3. Seventh-day Adventists believe that Lucifer (Latin for *light-bearer*) was created as the first and highest among the heavenly angels. In addition to the heavenly angels, we believe that there are beings living in other worlds throughout the universe. (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) But, God also is a God of love; (1 John 4:8,16) and He recognizes that in order to have love He must also allow freedom. And in the context of freedom, it is always possible that someone will choose not to love but to rebel.
4. Read Revelation 12:1-12; Isaiah 14:12-15; and Ezekiel 28:12-19. Putting these passages together, we discover that Lucifer was created perfect and blameless. He was, in fact, a light-bearer for God, actually bearing one of the names of God given to him by God. He was an anointed, covering cherub, standing beside the throne of God in heaven. He is described as walking amidst the stones of fire and covered with gems. But, he became proud because of his beauty. He wanted to be equal with God or even superior to God; and thus, he was cast from the "stones of fire" down to this earth, and he managed to take a third of the angels with him. He was in Eden, the garden of God. Ultimately, he will be sent down to the deepest part of the world of the dead. So, how could someone who had been for so long so close to God even think of rebelling against Him? Shouldn't this warn us of the danger of selfishness—the very principle of Satan's government.
5. Notice that Isaiah said, "He said in his heart," (Isaiah 14:13, *NASB*) implying that Lucifer began quietly thinking to himself; and then, later, he was "trading" which probably refers to the slandering of the character of God and stirring up rebellion. He wanted to have the power of God and the abilities of God; but, he tried to do that without having the character of love necessary to be God or having the nature of God. Thus, sin began in God's family.
6. When God created our world and placed Adam and Eve in the garden—because He allows and "requires" freedom of choice—He allowed Satan one place to approach them—the tree of knowledge of good and evil. That was supposed to be a protection for Adam and Eve because they were supposed to stay away from that tree. But, as we know, Eve was deceived and took Adam with her; and they became the first pair of sinners on this earth. Satan then immediately claimed that he was the prince or king of this earth.
7. Many years later, we get a hint about Satan's activities in the story of Job. (Read Job 1:6-12

and 2:1-9) Satan, claiming to be the head of this earth, appeared in the courts of heaven to represent this earth. He has always been the accuser of God and His people; (Zechariah 3:1-5; Revelation 12:10) and in the book of Job, we see him in action. God pronounced Job “perfect and upright.” Satan accused God of not being capable of correctly judging character. Satan claimed that no human being could be worthy of such a statement; in effect, **Satan was calling God a liar.** (Job 4:17-19) And we know what happened. Satan did everything he could to get Job to turn against God, but Satan failed. And finally, in Job 42:7-8, God told Job’s friends that Job had said of Him what was right. So, what was happening in this story? Satan was accusing Job; and by accusing Job, Satan was accusing God. (Revelation 12:10)

8. So, how was God supposed to respond to this all-out attack on His reputation and His name? God runs a **transparent** government. Daniel 7:9-10 tell us that hundreds of millions of angels are watching as God does His judging. And what is their response? Repeatedly, they say that His judgments are true and righteous altogether.
9. But, there is still the problem of sin. How was God supposed to deal with sin and rebellion? Romans 8:3 tells us that God sent His Son to deal with sin. God put His reputation and the fate of the universe on the line in the life, mission, and death of Jesus Christ all the way to the cross. (Romans 3:1-4,21-26) God and His way of governing is on trial.
10. And what are we supposed to learn from the death of Jesus? Way back in Genesis 2:17, God had said that sin leads to death. (Compare Romans 6:23) In Satan’s first opportunity to speak to Eve, **he called God a liar** (Genesis 3:1-5) and claimed that God was literally withholding something beneficial from Adam and Eve. So, we see that the great controversy is really about who is telling the truth. And it is very interesting to look at Romans 3:25-26 where Paul said three times that God’s righteousness must be demonstrated before he finally talked about how God puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.
11. Does that help us to understand more clearly the priorities in the great controversy?

With intense interest the unfallen worlds had watched to see Jehovah arise, and sweep away the inhabitants of the earth. And if God should do this, Satan was ready to carry out his plan for securing to himself the allegiance of heavenly beings. He had declared that the principles of God’s government make forgiveness impossible. Had the world been destroyed, he would have claimed that his accusations were proved true. He was ready to cast blame upon God, and to spread his rebellion to the worlds above. But instead of destroying the world, God sent His Son to save it. Though corruption and defiance might be seen in every part of the alien province, a way for its recovery was provided. At the very crisis, when Satan seemed about to triumph, the Son of God came with the embassy of divine grace.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 37.2.

12. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus essentially died as a direct result of sin. He had to be revived by an angel coming down from heaven. (Luke 22:43; DA 693.1) Notice that He was so distraught by the separation that had come between Himself and His Father that He was sweating great drops of blood which were falling to the ground. (Luke 22:44) The onlooking universe realized exactly what was happening there, and they agreed that God had told the truth about sin: It causes death. But, we as human beings had no idea what was happening. So, Christ was arrested and went through that awful trial, the beatings, and the crucifixion leading to that fairly rapid death on the cross so that we might raise questions about exactly what caused His death. When Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30) and died, His disciples were hiding behind locked doors in deep fear and disappointment while the universe was rejoicing at God’s answers and triumph. God’s statement about sin had been verified.
13. But, a further question had to be dealt with. How does God treat us sinners? Are His

judgments fair, righteous, and true? (Read Psalm 96:10,13; 2 Timothy 4:8; Revelation 16:5,7; 19:2) God's character is revealed in His judgments. Abraham was right way back in Genesis 18:25 when he said, "The judge of all the earth must deal justly."

14. As we approach the end of this world's history, there are three phases of judgment that vindicate God's righteousness. In the pre-advent judgment, the rest of the universe agrees that God has judged righteously and fairly. The righteous will be taken to heaven during the millennial period and will confirm that statement. And finally, at the third coming following the crowning of Jesus Christ high above the New Jerusalem and the panoramic scene depicted in *Great Controversy* 666-668, even Satan himself will bow and admit that God's judgments have been righteous. (Philippians 2:5-11) Even Satan will finally bow and admit not only God's superior power but also God's justice, righteousness, and fairness in recognizing the supremacy of Christ. (*Great Controversy* 670,671)
15. Read Matthew 5:16. Is it really possible for Christ's followers on this earth to bring glory to God's name or, by contrast, even to shame it? Is there any evidence even from the Old Testament that God's friends recognized the importance of doing things for the benefit of God's name and character? Read Ezekiel 20:8-9,13-14, 21-22, 43-44; 36:20-32; **Daniel 9:4-19**; Isaiah 48:11) See the handout, "The Great Controversy in Scripture" at <http://www.theox.org> under Teacher's Guides/General Topics.
16. So, what are we supposed to learn from all of this? We need to recognize that we are the theater to the entire universe. We live on a stage. (1 Corinthians 4:9) God intends for His church to teach the universe something about His goodness and His righteousness. (Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19-20)
17. Of any group, Seventh-day Adventists have the most logical and consistent understanding of Scripture. By contrast, note these words from the *Bible Study Guide*:

There are many Christians who deny the existence of Satan, seeing him as merely an ancient superstition held by primitive people who were looking to explain evil and suffering in the world. Think about how great a deception such a view is. It's hard to imagine what kind of Christianity could deny the reality of a power that is so often revealed in the Bible, especially the New Testament, as a real being. What does this tell us about just how powerfully influenced some churches are by the inroads of modernism and secularism? What can we, as Seventh-day Adventists, learn from the mistakes that we see others making in order that we not fall into the same deception, as well? Without a literal Satan, what happens to the whole great controversy theme? (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, December 20)

18. And demonstrating the truth about God's character and government is so important that even if every single human being were lost, God would still have to do it.

It was in order that the heavenly universe might see the conditions of the covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race. **The throne of Justice must be eternally and forever made secure, even tho the race [That is us!] be wiped out, and another creation populate the earth.** By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, all doubts would be forever settled, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. Christ alone could restore honor to God's government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped....Who is able to describe the last scenes of Christ's life on earth, His trial in the judgment hall, His crucifixion? Who witnessed these scenes?—The heavenly universe, God the Father, Satan and his angels." *The Signs of the*

Times, July 12, 1899 par. 2 [Bold and content in brackets are supplied]

19. So, what has the universe learned from the great controversy so far? They witnessed firsthand the pride and selfishness of Lucifer, leading to a war of ideas in heaven. God had to deal with that in some way. He had to be righteous and gracious at the same time. But not only does God expect the universe to learn lessons from all of that, He expects us to learn also.
20. Ultimately, we are left with several very significant questions: 1) Can God be righteous and fair and still save sinners? (Job 1:8-11; Romans 3:25-26) Moses and Paul said, "Absolutely, yes!"
- 2) Why do we do what we do? While there are those who act out of fear or hope of reward and there are others who act out of a sense of justice and wanting to be a part of the peer group, there are some who actually do what is right because it is right—from principle.

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. **This will lead us to do right because it is right**—because right doing is pleasing to God.—*Christ's Object Lessons* 97,98 (1900)

21. So, does it really matter **why** we obey? Or, is it only important that we do obey?

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul.—*MS 20*, 1897 (MR # 970); *Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1897 par. 11 - section in [. . .] omitted in *That I May Know Him* p. 120.

22. So, do our motives really matter? Yes!
23. Finally, perhaps the ultimate question is: Who is telling us the truth? Whom should we trust and obey? (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-4; Job 13:15-18; Romans 3:4) Can God be trusted?
24. According to the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34, those who have a right relationship with God will find—through study of the Scriptures and prayer—that God will put His law within their hearts. He will be their God, and they will be His people.

None of them will have to teach his fellow-citizen to know the LORD, because all will know me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs. I, the LORD, have spoken. (*GNB*)

The only true obedience comes from learning to know God well enough to realize that everything He asks us to do is for our best good so that we come to trust Him. Isn't that what the great controversy is all about?

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