

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY BETWEEN CHRIST AND SATAN

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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.

One need not travel far from a Christian college to find youth who feel that God should be restrained in His demands for consecration. What right has He to extort self-denial? Why does He presume to intrude upon a person's deepest emotional and sexual urges? Why can't He be satisfied with the reasonableness of a token allegiance? Christ bore the cross only because he was essentially God, and had an advantage and power beyond us; why His insistence on our bearing it? Is it not an impossible demand? Isn't God the greatest "kill-joy" there is, the supreme "wet-blanket"? Seriously, is He not rather like a vain Oriental monarch in his maniacal demand for us to practically crawl on our belly before Him in abject surrender? Maybe one had better ask the question only in a whisper, but— isn't God really selfish? None of us asked to be; He made us what we are, and put us on this stage of

life. And yet He demands of us a painful submission which is apparently self-negation and the undoing of all that He has made us to be.

God is on trial. It may be an excessive anthropomorphism to say that He is on trial for His life, but it is no exaggeration to say that the issues are serious. "For our redemption, heaven itself was imperiled" (COL 196). As the Infinite One and Omnipotent One, He can, of course, force submission, but only at the cost of His status as a God of love. If He can survive defeat at the hands of Lucifer, His character must be drastically altered, and the willing, loving allegiance of His subjects replaced by fearful, sycophant submission. If God should prematurely intervene in world history by the Second Advent with all its attendant eschatology, Satan has his plans all ready. The following statement speaks primarily of the first advent of Christ with its contingencies, but certain principles are implicit relative to the second:

"The unfallen worlds watched with intense interest to see Jehovah arise and sweep away the inhabitants of the earth, and Satan boasted that if God did do this, he would complete his plans and secure for himself the allegiance of the unfallen worlds. He had arguments ready by which to cast blame upon God, and to spread his rebellion to the worlds above." "God's Love Unmeasured," ST, May 21, 1912.

If, prior to an indisputable vindication of God, He intervenes in history by the translation of a group of supposedly righteous people whose righteousness is not proven to be better than that of people on

Lucifer's side, and if He resurrects the dead and takes them to heaven, arbitrarily destroying the vast majority of earth's population in the process, one can be sure that Satan will make capital of God's high-handed unilateral intervention, and seek to spread disaffection throughout the universe. He will beat on the gates of heaven and shout "unfair!" until the din will be impossible for the universe to endure. If God does not produce a final, incontrovertible answer to the problem of the rebellion, disaster in one form or the other becomes inevitable. A universe serving God only from terror is the essence of sin itself permeating it everywhere. The other alternative to God's vindication would be that the universe become a vast Libya.

The sanctuary. During the trial, often spoken of as the "great controversy," God is to the inhabitants of this earth, at least, in a kind of exile. As King David felt obliged to vacate the throne in Jerusalem and leave for temporary exile when his son Absalom rebelled, so God sets up temporary "field headquarters" from where the warfare is directed in putting down the rebellion. The sanctuary is God's "tabernacle" or "tent" (cf. Heb. 9:2; 9:11; Rev. 13:6; 15:5; 21:3).

The honor of the sanctuary is the honor of God's throne. That honor is in jeopardy until the issues are settled finally. As the word "Pharaoh" to the ancient Egyptians connoted "government house," and the word "White House" means to Americans the executive branch of their government, so the "cleansing of the sanctuary" means the vindication of God's "house" or government in relation to the

problem of sin. The sanctuary is the setting for all the activities of Christ.

What must obviously be proven clearly to the world and to the unfallen universe is as follows:

1. That God's character is not selfish, but is love itself.

2. That self-denial is essential and possible to the human family.

3. That the law of God is just and unselfish, and that it can be obeyed by man in his fallen nature in sinful flesh.

4. That man's service and worship of God need not necessarily be "motivated" by egocentric purposes which ultimately transform worship into sin and idolatry.

5. That God has resources of character to put down and to exterminate rebellion and sin, and that He is not merely the omnipotent Heavyweight Champion who at last must resort to force to gain the victory in His universe. To prove that might makes right is not enough; it must be evident that right is might.

6. That God's demand that His creatures be unselfish and obedient is reasonable.

7. That God has the perfect right, demonstrable throughout all eternity, to redeem human beings from this sinful world, both by resurrection and by translation.

8. That His "invasion" of this world in the Second Advent is desired by the rational, intelligent, and responsible human beings living on this planet.

9. That the rebellion of sin was "uncaused," and that His character and His government have been

in no wise responsible either for the original rebellion in heaven, or for the fall of man on earth, or for the continuance and perpetuation of sin through the millenniums of human history.

10. That Satan, his angels, and the hosts of the finally impenitent human beings who have responsibly joined him in the rebellion, confess that God “deserves” (Rev. 5:12, 13, Moffatt) vindication and victory, together with the unfallen universe.

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.

The great controversy has involved the universe as well as this fallen planet, for vs. 12 says that because of the victory won in this reconciliation, “Rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them.” Finally, it will be said: “The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation.” This blessed harmony will be the result of God’s work on His cosmic Day of Atonement—which means simply, His Day of Reconciliation, the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, the ending of alienation.

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.