

# WHAT IS GOD DOING NOW THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

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Revelation 12:7, 8<sup>1</sup>

The popular magazine *Christianity Today* asks in big letters on the cover, “What in the World Is God Doing?” It answers (of course) “find out” by re-subscribing to our magazine. But the question is far more than a clever advertising ploy. Millions of thoughtful people worldwide who want to believe in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ are anxiously wondering: where is He, and what He is doing today? We are firmly convinced that He answers this question so clearly in the Bible that even a child can understand.

He is busy fighting the last battle of a “great controversy between Christ and Satan.” In fighting this war with Satan, God is contending for the heart-commitment of His people; He can never win the conflict unless He has succeeded in winning a corporate body to be so truly on His side that He can honestly say, they “are with Him” (Rev. 17:14). Therefore, what God is “doing in the world” is winning honest hearts to “be . . . reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:19). It’s the most difficult spiritual struggle He’s had in all the millennia since sin began. That’s where reality is!

“What is Jesus doing now?” is a question many believers in Him ask. Since He is the Son of God who suffered unspeakable agony on this planet when He was crucified, it seems only fair that He is entitled to a l-o-o-n-g “vacation” after such a terrible ordeal. He did His duty heroically; now He can rest, and enjoy the plaudits of the heavenly hosts, and the praise of at least some of earth’s inhabitants.

But the Book of Hebrews does not reveal Him as on furlough; He is working 24 hours a day, 365 days a year “continually” as our great High Priest—a full time job for the infinite Son of God. And the Holy Spirit is the grand, authentic “vicar of Christ” who is ministering constantly to millions and billions of human beings who long for salvation. If the Queen of England or the president of the U.S. deserves a full-time physician on duty, Christ as infinite High Priest is the full time Physician of our souls on duty to minister to every one who has faith in Him, giving His full attention as though there were not another “patient.”

Jesus is not having a super-vacation in some heavenly resort, simply awaiting the Father’s cue to come down here His second time. No, He is actively ministering as the world’s great High Priest, even though multitudes know nothing of this reality. He feels all the pain that humans around the world are feeling. If we feel the little that our severely limited knowledge can sense, think of what He knows and senses!

He longs to bring all this pain and suffering to an end. He can’t turn off His TV and go to sleep at night as we do and forget it all in blissful slumber.

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<sup>1</sup> “We Are Living We Are Dwelling”; 312.

‘He . . . shall neither slumber nor sleep’ (Psalm 121:4), keeping awake 24 hours a day in watchfulness, ready to answer prayers and send angels on errands of mercy.

He begs His people to sense this reality of corporate suffering as He feels it, to share with Him the burden that He carries (see Rev. 3:20, 21).

“What is Christ doing now?” is a question that perplexes many people. Before He left this planet, He told us, “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Mt. 28:18). But why is evil getting worse and worse? Why doesn’t Christ exercise that “all power” and do something? Is He on vacation somewhere in the vast universe? No, that can’t be because He promised the disciples the evening before His crucifixion, “I will not leave you orphans; come to you” (Jn. 14:18). The “coming” He was talking about was not His second coming in glory, but His coming through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, for He said, “The Father shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever” (vs. 16). That “Comforter” is Christ working through the Holy Spirit. His first work is to “convict the world of sin.”

The evidence that you have received the true Holy Spirit is not to dance and shout and fall on the floor, but to realize what your sin is. The Holy Spirit shows you who you are, and the picture is not a pretty one to look at. You see your selfishness in contrast with the purity of Christ’s character. That’s impossible for any of us to experience except through the work of the Holy Spirit. His second work is to convict the world of righteousness, that is, to

make the character of Christ apparent to our once-blinded eyes. His third work is to convict “the world of judgment.” This is not a duplicate of the first work, convicting of sin (16:8-11). Jesus assumes that we have responded to the first and second works of the Holy Spirit so that He gives us the still Good News of the third work of the Holy Spirit: to convince the world that Satan has suffered “judgment” and is therefore “cast out” of our hearts and lives, He is a conquered foe. This imparts to every believer an immense sense of relief and self-respect. “What is Jesus doing now?” Working night and day, 7 days a week, no holidays, on human hearts in “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” to prepare them for the final crisis of the “great controversy between Christ and Satan.”

If you have sensed a conviction of sin, of your great need, you have received the first work of the Holy Spirit. It’s a miracle that our sinful hearts cannot experience except through His work! Respond to that conviction, and don’t stop Him from doing His second and third works also.

“What is Jesus doing now?” Hebrews zeroes in on the two-phase ministry of that heavenly High Priest as symbolized by the two apartments in the earthly sanctuary prototype (Heb 9:1-14). As there was an annual “day of atonement” (Yom Kippur) in the “earthly” Hebrew sanctuary, so there must be a cosmic or antitypical Day of Atonement in the heavenly sanctuary where. The ancient Yom Kippur symbolized the removal of all the sins of Israel from the sanctuary where they had been recorded, and their expulsion as so much garbage. Each earthly

day of atonement resulted in a full or complete “atonement” for Israel, all sins blotted out and a total reconciliation with God, the scapegoat symbolizing Satan forever banished from the camp of Israel. Since the heavenly high priestly ministry is the grand antitype, what is the difference between Christ’s first-apartment ministry and His second-apartment ministry? Hebrews 9 makes it clear: “It is appointed unto men once to die but after this the judgment” (vs. 28); this gives us a glimpse of His first-apartment ministry—preparing people to die, ready for “the judgment.” This has been His ministry in most of the nearly 2000 years since His sacrifice. But “unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (vs. 29). His cosmic Day of Atonement ministry is concentrated on preparing a people for translation at His second coming. But what about those who die during this time? In the ancient service, the first-apartment ministry continued through the final day of atonement; so it is today. But we must not forget or frustrate Christ’s primary goal for today!

It was never God’s plan that “Israel,” ancient or modern, should poison the world with hatred and violence. His promise to Abraham regarding his descendants (through “Isaac”) was, “Thou shalt be a blessing, . . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:2, 3). The promise was fulfilled “in Christ,” but the world still awaits the “blessing” of peace that God’s people were to bring.

According to the Bible, “Israel” still exists, but not as a nation of literal Jews. Revelation says that the “twelve tribes” are still out there being “sealed, . . .

of all nations, and people, and tongues” (Rev. 7:1-9). The seal is a final vindication “of the living God” placed upon those who “overcome even as [Christ] overcame.” They are “the remnant” of the true “Israel” of all ages who are Abraham’s true descendants by faith in Christ (Rev. 12:17). But they do not bring hatred and bloodshed into the world! They minister to the world in the name of the One who is “the Prince of peace.”

According to Revelation 7, their proclamation of the sealing message makes it possible for God to “hold the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth” until “another angel . . . having the seal of God . . . seal[s] the servants of our God in their foreheads.”

Nothing could be more important than for “Israel” of today to hear, to understand, and then to proclaim that “sealing message,” free from “Babylon’s” confusion. Nothing else can bring “peace in our time.”

The “mother” of Christian problems: how can we as followers of Jesus get through this ever-present barrier of the love of self? How can we as individuals learn how to die to self? More serious yet—how can we as a corporate body, as a church, be “crucified with Christ”? Is it possible now? Or must we be like Israel at Kadesh-Barnea when they failed to enter their Promised Land for 40 years of “wandering” (Numbers 14)? Must we be sent back into the “wilderness” to die off so a fresh new generation can arise to scale the barrier of “self” that has weakened our witness for thousands of years?

Straight off, we know that a newly invented legalism-program is not the answer. Trying harder is not it; more “works” is not it. The only way out is for the love of self to be crucified “with Christ,” not just re-tortured through new forms of anxious fear.

The sanctuary in heaven that the Book of Hebrews talks about is God’s office headquarters, His Pentagon where the great war between Christ and Satan is planned and executed. There is intense activity right now. Heaven is awake! As followers of Jesus we are soldiers in the army. But the “fight” is the “good fight of faith.” Christ is the High Priest ministering there in a special closing work that has never been fully accomplished in the past—a final and complete reconciling of alienated human hearts to the Savior.

This special work reproduces in every believing heart and life the character of Christ. It makes possible the ending of the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

There must be a new fresh element that enters in during these last days. It’s a clearer grasp and therefore deeper appreciation of what Christ went through on His cross, when He saved us. Beholding that sight leads to self being crucified with Christ. It’s not a works trip; it’s a faith trip.

We read in 1 Timothy 2 what God is doing. He “desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (vs. 4). We believe it.

But how seriously does He “desire” that?

He gave (did not merely lend) His Son to be our Savior (vs. 6).

But for anyone to be “saved” truly, he must learn to be happy in heaven, to be “pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8). That means a change of heart, a “renewed mind” (Rom. 12:2), a total change of character. But what is God doing to make that possible for sinners? Has He piled up roadblocks to make it difficult?

So much does the Lord “desire” us to be saved, that Jesus says the Holy Spirit actually makes it hard for anyone to be lost! We can resist and reject all that He does for us; but a wise writer has said that “all along the road that leads to [eternal] death there are pains and penalties, there are sorrows and disappointments, there are warnings not to go on. God’s love has made it hard for the heedless and headstrong to destroy themselves.”

Jesus says His “yoke is easy” and it is “hard” for us to resist Him. The Father “desires all men to be saved,” and He cannot do more to save those “all men” than He is doing!

Some 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.

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?

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.

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 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. 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.

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.

There is absolutely nothing easier that a human being can do than to look at something. Eternal salvation requires that one thing—to LOOK. There it is, plainly taught in the Bible—“LOOK unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” (Isa. 45:22). The Hebrew word means to turn the face toward. Perhaps you have noticed how often the word BEHOLD occurs in the Bible—hundreds of times. When the poisonous snake would bite the Israelite, all he had to do was to BEHOLD the snake Moses lifted up on a pole. John says, “BEHOLD what manner of love (*AGAPE*) the Father hath bestowed upon us” (1 Jn. 3:1). It’s as though God keeps saying to us, “See, look, watch what I’ve done!” Christianity is a religion of look and live, behold and be saved. But is it possible that people won’t look, see, watch, or consider? Is God doing something wonderful that won’t get the world’s attention? Wouldn’t it be terrible if the Son of God is sacrificed on a cross and most people never even bother to LOOK? But let’s remember—God knows how to get the world’s attention!