

THE GREATEST COURT CASE IN HISTORY: GOD ON TRIAL¹

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Jesus' life and death demonstrate a phenomenon because of the mysterious opposition He had to endure: He proved to the world that the natural mind of humanity is "enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). This is the true source of all the evil there is.

Even before His birth in the stable in Bethlehem, His mother had to endure rejection because the people would give her no shelter there, even though she was great with child (Luke 2:7). Although they did not know that she carried the Saviour of the world, they did not welcome suffering humanity in the person of His mother. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:10, 11). And then as soon as Jesus was born as a baby in the stable, King Herod tried to kill Him (Matt. 2:3-8, 16). Thus "enmity against God" again flared forth.

Strange to say, hatred and rejection dogged His steps all His life. He complained to His own people, "All I have ever done is to tell you the truth I heard from God, yet you are trying to kill me." A few minutes later "they picked up stones to throw at him" (John 8:40, 59, GNB). Finally, their enmity knew no bounds. They could not endure His presence among them, and they yelled, "Crucify

him! Crucify him!" Imagine! Treating the Son of God like that!

Mankind has spent thousands of years searching for God. They have speculated, guessed, reasoned, imagined, philosophized about Him. But Jesus came to *reveal* Him. "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father," He says. The Chinese have a proverb, "One picture is worth a thousand words." The life and character of Jesus tell us more about God than a thousand philosophers' opinions.

Thus, as Jesus came to reveal God to us, in so doing He revealed another important truth: God has some people who hate Him. Like the truth of *agape* which took the world by surprise, this was also a new revelation. We humans always have plenty of enemies, but no one had ever before imagined that *God* has enemies, least of all the people who professed to worship Him!

This Sheds Light on Other Dark Mysteries

The apostles told the people, "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead" (Acts 3:14, 15). The people who treated Him so cruelly were "the princes of this world" (1 Cor. 2:8). Is the world the same today? If Jesus were to return, would they welcome Him now?

Many may claim that they would, but would they endure His searching reproofs? His example of unselfishness would expose their selfishness. Strangely enough, it was that revelation of *agape* love that so angered "the princes of this world." Jesus does not expect that the world itself will

¹ Revelation 14:6. 223, 221.

welcome Him when He comes the second time, for He asked mournfully, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

Why does the world reject Him? What do they have against Him? The idea that God must go into court and stand trial is not so farfetched. In the person of His Son, He has already been arrested and put on trial, several times. Though He was the innocent Son of God, He was arrested and hailed into court on imagined charges of wrong-doing. He had no lawyer to plead His case, so He defended Himself (the story is told in John 5:19-46). Again He was arrested and taken to court for His final condemnation. But there is an even greater court case in which God is on trial.

The Great Final Battle of Armageddon

The Bible declares that the evil world will organize to make war against God. The pent-up resentments and enmity of the ungodly will finally erupt in a battle known as Armageddon. In holy vision the prophet John saw this final conflict develop. First, he saw that two "harvests" on earth will ripen side by side: those who are the good grain and are loyal to God; and those who are rebels against Him, the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. . . . And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress" (Rev. 14:15, 19, 20). This is the final crisis.

All upon earth will join one side or the other. Those who rebel against Him will "[a] make war with the

Lamb [Jesus], and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and [b] they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful" (Rev. 17:14). "The spirits of devils, working miracles, go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (Rev. 16:14, 16).

This sheds light on many mysterious developments in the world. This war is not to be understood as a *literal* one with armaments. Since the "carnal mind is enmity against God," and "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15), it is clear that this is a *spiritual war*. But it is even more real than any physical war, because these are the final spiritual issues lurking in the shadows behind all of humanity's wars. This great controversy between God and Satan will be resolved for all eternity, and truth will win the victory. In symbolic language, John beheld this final conflict:

"I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; . . . and he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the

fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:11-16).

The picture becomes clear from these several passages:

(1) The enemies of God initiate this last battle.

(2) The “kings of the earth and of the whole world” will join in the cause against “the Lamb”.

(3) Some serious world crisis will provoke this eruption of “enmity against God,” as they imagine that somehow God is responsible for the evil that has become by then unmanageable throughout the world.

(4) As The Word of God, Christ wins the victory.

(5) There are those loyal to Him, on His side, “clothed in fine linen, clean and white.” Because they are loyal to Him, the world’s enmity will be directed against them also. Jesus said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, . . . but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:18, 19). Christ comes to defend and save them.

(6) The reason for God’s “fierce wrath” is not a selfish one; the world will seek to destroy those people who choose to remain loyal to Him. As a parent is angry when some beast tries to beat up or kill his helpless child, so this is what arouses God’s anger (see Rev. 13:11-17).

(7) The ones who stir up the nations to “make war” against Him are “the spirits of devils, working

miracles.” But those who “make war” against Him *think* they have good reason to do so.

The ancient patriarch Job did not fight against God, but he complained against Him because he thought that it was God who was tormenting him, when in reality it was man’s enemy, Satan. Job even wanted to take God into court: “If God were human, I could answer him; we could go to court to decide our quarrel” (Job 9:32, GNB).

When a prominent national leader we trust is arraigned in court, the case attracts front-page newspaper or TV coverage. What kind of publicity would a case attract if God Himself were on trial? Revelation says such a court case will convene: “Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come” (Rev. 14:6). The original language indicates that it is God Himself who is on trial. As in the case with Job, He has become the accused in the dock, and He needs a defense.

In fact, Jesus denies that His Father will judge His enemies: “The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, . . . because He is the Son of man” (John 5:22, 27). Further, Christ refuses to serve as Judge to anyone who rejects Him: “If anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47). Thus the only people whom Christ will finally judge will be those who are loyal to Him, and then He will acquit or vindicate them. Therefore “the hour of His judgment” can mean the hour when God Himself is on trial, as much as that He judges others.

Why So Many People Are Angry with God

Great numbers of people on earth blame God for their troubles, and especially for the horrendous injustices that plague the world at large. For example, why should two-thirds of the people in Calcutta live in squalid poverty while the other third live in comfort? Is God to blame in some way? Isn't He all-powerful?

Why does God permit horrendous floods and earthquakes to come? In our legal language, these disasters are often called "acts of God." Many people, if they had a chance, would join a class-action suit against Him. God could zap His opponents out of existence, but that would not solve the problem. It would only play the final issue into the hands of Satan who would accuse Him of gross injustice. Even a great nation on earth does not dare to destroy a weaker nation, for it would be hailed into the "court" of world opinion and condemned. So God must face the even greater "court" of the entire universe. This is a spiritual reality, a "court" more real than any which meets in earthly chambers.

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.

An opposite extreme is the idea that God is an powerless weakling sitting on an archaic throne "ruling" an empire that has ceased to exist. He has been 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” (Ps. 50:21).

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).

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.

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. (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).

7. It is impossible for fallen man to obey the divine law, or to resist temptation (PP 88).

8. 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.

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.

An apostle of Jesus saw that God will have to go in the dock, yet he was confident “that You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged” (Paul, Rom. 3:4, NKJV). The NEB says, “and win the verdict when Thou art on trial.” The Goodspeed translation says, “and win your case when you go into court.” God must meet the accumulated charges of the ages.

Many people have never thought of the possibility of God being on trial. It is an insight found only in

the Bible. The Muslim's Allah requires the worshiper to prostrate himself in a blind submission to His capricious will. But the God of the Bible says, "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18). God is not a tyrant who forces devotion, like an ancient autocrat who executed anyone whom he chanced to dislike. Only when the case is settled openly to the satisfaction of everyone, can the controversy be ended and sin and evil finally be vanquished. Then "affliction shall not rise up the second time" (Nahum 1:9).

This final "hour of His judgment" is the Day of Atonement, prefigured in the ancient sanctuary service which was a kindergarten lesson to explain the Gospel in Old Testament times. Those who had true faith in God always knew that "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). Only the blood of the great Lamb of God could ever do that (John 1:29). When the believer offered an animal sacrifice, he confessed his faith in the Lamb of God yet to come. Likewise, the ancient Day of Atonement could never resolve the final judgment of God; it only pointed *forward* to it.

The Meaning of the Great Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement came on the tenth day of the seventh month, when all were required to leave their usual work and gather around the sanctuary as "an holy convocation," a calling-together of all the people. They were told to "afflict your souls" (Lev. 23:27). This meant fasting and deep spiritual concern, for it was an emergency crisis. *But it was not a selfish concern for themselves.* Their high

priest had little bells sewed on the bottom of his garment as he entered the Most Holy Apartment of the sanctuary. They could not go in with him personally, but *by faith* they entered with him. They were concerned for *him* as he came into the symbolic presence of God Himself. Would he be slain in that holy presence, for "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29)? As long as they heard the tinkling of those bells, they knew their high priest was safe, and they rejoiced. Because they considered themselves incorporate in their high priest, they were concerned for him.

So in this grand cosmic Day of Atonement, our concern is not for ourselves, for our own petty security. The state of the world is a cosmic emergency. "Business as usual" is no longer good enough. Our concern is for the honor and the vindication of the God of truth and righteousness that He may be victorious in the final struggle with evil. Thus the first angel of Revelation 14 issues his call to all the world: I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of *His* judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. . . . Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:6, 7, 12).

Several important truths here deserve our attention:

(1) This message can be given only in our modern times; never before has it been *possible* for any message to go to all the world in this way. The message appeals to people of all races and cultures, in all lands. God sends the message, and not even all the forces of hell can prevent its proclamation.

(2) The message is the Good News of the saving grace of Jesus. It awakens the attention of the world because it is pure Good News.

(3) "The hour of God's judgment" can mean the hour when He Himself is on trial.

(4) We can "give glory to Him," honor Him, and in so doing we can help to vindicate Him because we can be witnesses to His saving power.

(5) The call to "worship Him" is a quotation from God's commandment to "keep holy" the Sabbath day in remembrance of His creation of the world in six days, and His resting on the seventh day (Ex. 20:8-11). As a memorial of creation, the Sabbath is a defense against worldly materialism which comes with the theory of evolution. It is a call to spiritual living, in harmony with God's holy will. This message is a worldwide call to repentance.

(6) The fruit borne by it is to raise up a people who gladly cherish the faith of Jesus and follow Him in obedience to all His commandments. The love of Christ constrains them!

While the nations may not lower themselves to notice it, this work is going forward in all the world today. No other work is as important. It is our privilege to demonstrate in our lives the beauty of Christ's holiness, to give evidence to the world at

large that His grand sacrifice was not in vain. Instead of being concerned for *our* reward, what is important is that Jesus receive *His* reward. And He will, for the promise is that "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11).

When Does This Work Begin and End?

According to the prophecy in Daniel 8:11-14, the heavenly Day of Atonement must begin at the end of the 2300 year prophecy, in the year 1844 A.D. "Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed," that is, then shall come the beginning of the hour of God's judgment of which Revelation 14:6, 7 speaks. Revelation 11:15-19 describes it:

"The seventh angel sounded [his trumpet], and there were great voices in heaven, saying. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. . . . And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament."

(1) The judgment will result in total victory and vindication for God, and establish His kingdom.

(2) While this work goes forward to completion, the nations on earth are "angry."

(3) All of God's faithful people of all ages, many of whom have been martyrs, will be vindicated.

(4) This time of heavenly judgment is also a time of unprecedented ecological crisis on this planet.

(5) The work of judgment is accomplished in the heavenly “temple of God,” namely, in the Most Holy Apartment where “the ark of the covenant” is located.

(6) This is the last work to be completed before the end of the world when Jesus returns in glory.

When He comes, the work of judgment will be completed. Each person will have determined where he or she will stand. Just before the return of Jesus, the decree is passed in heaven:

“The time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:10-12).

Here is no harsh, vindictive pronouncement of doom on anyone. It is simply leaving every person to choose what he or she wants to be for eternity! There could be no more sad judgment than to realize, if you are “unjust” or “filthy,” that you must be that way forever!

But a Saviour is provided, so that he or she who is “unjust” or “filthy” can become “righteous” and “holy” through faith in His blood. Ask Him to receive you as His child; He will! The hour of judgment still lingers. Do not delay any longer!