

1. The War Behind All Wars (2Q 2024 The Great Controversy)

Biblical material: Rev. 12:7–9, Ezek. 28:12–15, Isa. 14:12–14, Gen. 3:15, John 17:24–26.

Quotes

- When we use the term “the great controversy,” what do we mean? *Mark Finley*
- The central issue in the Great Controversy is over who can best run the universe, God or Satan. *Herb Douglass*
- The cosmic controversy has to do with the love of God. *Norman Gulley*
- What is the pivotal issue in this life and death struggle? God’s Government and Law. *General Conference, Seventh-day Adventists Believe...*
- All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. *Seventh-day Adventists Fundamental Belief #8.*
- At the root of the great controversy lie several issues. Some of these include God’s law, His character and authority, His justice and mercy, His prerogatives, and the position of His Son, Jesus. *John M. Fowler*
- In the Adventist understanding of this great cosmic conflict, God temporarily limits his power in order to demonstrate his goodness. But not all Adventists are equally enthusiastic about the topic. Typically, the theodicy question is more likely to be raised by those who are concerned to defend God’s goodness, rather than by those who simply wish to affirm God’s power. *Alden Thompson*

Questions

How would you explain the reasons for the great controversy? How do different understandings over the issues influence how we see the controversy and the way in which God acts? What misunderstandings over the great controversy advance the Devil’s agenda? Is the great controversy the answer to all the theological questions we may have?

Bible summary

Rev. 12:7–9 details where the conflict began—in heaven! Ezek. 28:12–15 provides the background for Lucifer’s fall under the imagery of the king of Tyre: “Once you were complete and perfect, full of wisdom and flawless in beauty. You were there in Eden, God’s garden... I gave you the position of guardian cherub, and I anointed you. You lived on God’s holy mountain and you walked among the stones of fire. You were innocent in everything you did from the day you were created until you were found to be doing evil.” Isa. 14:12–14 explains Lucifer’s intentions: “Morning star, son of the dawn, how you have fallen from heaven! Destroyer of nations, you have been cut down to the ground! You said to yourself: ‘I will ascend to heaven. I will raise my throne above the stars of God. I will sit enthroned on the mountain of meeting, the summit of the northern mountain. I will ascend to the high places above the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”

God told the serpent in the garden, “I will make sure you and your children, and the woman and her children, are enemies. One of her children will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Gen. 3:15. In John 17:24–26 Jesus in his prayer to his Father says that he has revealed the Father’s character and will continue to do so.

Comment

While it’s certainly true that the great controversy provides the story arc, the metanarrative, to Scripture, the way it is understood and the issues involved are variously interpreted. The most

important decision to be made is over what the conflict really involves, for that will determine how we understand how it is ended—as well as the nature of God in all of this.

If it was just a question of God's power, the issue could have been settled very quickly. But Satan the Accuser did not question God's omnipotence, but rather his use of power. Making God out to be a divine dictator, Satan cast himself in the role of the great liberator fighting against the arbitrary rule of a God whose character was not one to be admired, only feared.

In his program of disinformation Satan was very successful, for he could use lies and smears that took considerable time to refute. For it wasn't enough for God to say Satan was wrong, it had to be demonstrated. This why we're still here! The process of demonstration continues to be worked out with all its consequences.

The central issue in the great controversy is who God is and how he acts. The devil has charged God with massive character defects, and actions that if true would be truly demonic. This cosmic conflict that has engulfed every thinking being is of supreme importance in understanding our own situation. Only with this as the permanent background can we begin to make sense of the world and our place in it, and our relationship to our creator God.

God seeks to demonstrate the issues in the great controversy, and the ultimate results of rebellion. Does sin kill? Surely and inevitably, yes. But how? Through the long and painful and bloody history of humanity, God allows all to see the consequences. Not treating us as pawns in some divine game, but as free moral agents, making choices that determine what happens. Yet, because of the effects of sin, the innocent suffer with the guilty, and God wants that point to be understood too.

So often God is dealing with very poor material—us! The Bible shows us the record of how God has handled the crisis, the conflict in his universe that has at heart the question of whether God is truly good or not. Does he love, or is it only on his dictatorial terms? Does he act arbitrarily, or is he reasoned and consistent? Does he take delight in punishing and destroying, or does he weep for the loss of every one of his unique children?

Sometimes we may wonder why God did not act more “decisively” in this war, take power and control, and dictate what should happen. But this is not the fundamental issue in the conflict. No one, not even the Devil, has disputed that God is all-powerful. In fact, that is one of the charges—that God is all-powerful and so he is a dictator, a tyrant, a despot who rules by force. So it is not a question of God unveiling his awesome power to enforce obedience to his autocratic will.

At times, God has used power, as the Bible records. Yet such actions do not achieve what God wants—agreement over truth and right, a relationship based not on fear but love. For when it comes to might and power, even the devils believe. But they tremble through simply acknowledging God's supremacy in power. God very clearly says that what he wants is not by might, nor by power, but by his spirit (see Zechariah 4:6)—the persuasion that comes from the third member of the Godhead that convicts and leads into all truth.

Ellen White Comments

The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God's original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. {Ed. 190}

The great conflict that Satan created in the heavenly courts is soon, very soon, to be forever decided. Soon all the inhabitants of the earth will have taken sides, either for or against the government of heaven... To every human being in the wide world who will give heed, we are to make plain the principles at stake in the great controversy--principles upon which hangs the eternal destiny of the soul. {7T 141.2}