



The Great Controversy

“For we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men” (1 Corinthians 4:9).

The tour group stood on stones where Jesus might have stood when He preached the sermon recorded in John 6. That day He urged His listeners to accept the gift of eternal life. The condition was simple: believe in Him and accept Him.

The guide pointed to the elaborate elegance of this ancient synagogue, now partially restored. From its soaring columns, decorated with floral motifs and the ark, he looked upward. Beyond in that blue sky (the roof was missing) he imagined Jesus looking down with tears in His eyes as He remembered that day when many of His disciples “walked no more with Him” (John 6:66).

The guide continued, “See these foundation stones? They formed the original synagogue of Jesus’ time. Here, most of His mighty works were done” (Matthew 11:20). Before Him sat people He had healed of all kinds of disease and sickness, or from whom He had cast out devils. But they wouldn’t accept the conditions of eternal life. They refused to repent.

The guide paused. “Once, Capernaum was a thriving town on the shores of Galilee. Now you see only ruins. No one but tourists walk among the rubble. Could Jesus have had sobs in His voice as He spoke the words of Matthew 11:23? “And thou, Capernaum, who art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”

Capernaum is an illustration of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Obviously, the devil won this battle, but he didn’t win the cosmic war that involves the entire universe. Some eighty miles south of the Sea of Galilee is a little hill just outside the city of Jerusalem, called Calvary. Here on the cross, Jesus gave the victorious shout, “It is finished.” From this place, His words brought joy to angels and unfallen beings in worlds afar.

Who will win the great controversy going on in your life: Christ or Satan?

Preview

How did it all begin? When did sin rear its ugly head in a perfect environment?

All the universe centered on the Godhead, until an angel gifted by the Creator with wisdom and beauty turned against His Creator. Ezekiel 28:15 describes Lucifer:

“Thou wast _____ in thy ways from the day that thou wast _____, till _____ was found in thee.”

The terrible mystery of the origin of evil is not explained. There’s no reason or excuse for discontent, selfishness, and pride to cause Lucifer to be corrupted by the gifts God gave him. Count the “I” statements in His thoughts.

“I will ascend into _____, I will exalt my _____ above the stars of _____ :

I will also sit on the _____ of the congregation, in the sides of the _____ : I will ascend above the _____ of the clouds; I will be like the _____” (Isaiah 14:13, 14).

Thus began the great controversy. Lucifer used a weapon God couldn't use. Lies. God is truth. By twisting facts and creating falsehoods, Lucifer blinded one third of the angels. This rebellion against God's government is recorded in Revelation 12:7-9:

“And there was _____ in heaven... he was cast out into the _____, and his _____ were cast out with him.”

How did we get involved? Satan hated the peace and purity of our first parents. He envied their joy as he watched them thrill over the beauties of Eden, enhanced by daily visits of their Creator.

God warned Adam and Eve, “Never go near that one tree. Do not eat the fruit, for then you will know death and evil.” But disguised as a serpent, Satan undermined their trust and loyalty to God (Genesis 3:5). They believed his lies! In that moment the devil stole dominion over the earth. His government of death, evil, and suffering began.

Saddest of all was the separation of Adam and Eve from God. Before God sent Adam and Eve away from Eden and the Tree of Life, He gave them hope—the promise of a Saviour. That's why Jesus had to come to this planet.

Points to Ponder

1. How did Satan's government impact the human race?

Division and disunity within the human family.

Genesis 4:8: “Cain rose up against _____ his brother, and slew him.”

Increase in human wickedness, leading to the flood.

Genesis 6:5: “Every imagination of the thoughts of his [human] heart was only evil continually.”

Genesis 6:13: “The earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.”

Babel and the resultant confusion also show an important element in the great controversy. (Genesis 11:1-9).

2. How do we know that the world became the stage on which the dramatic struggle between right and wrong is being played out?

Job 1:6, 7: “Now there was a day when the _____ came to present themselves before the _____, and _____ came also among them. And the Lord said to Satan, Whence comest thou? Then _____ answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the _____, and from walking up and down in it.” The story of Job illustrates how Satan and God are deeply interested in our lives, for different reasons.

Compare with 1 Corinthians 4:9: “We are made a _____ unto the world, and to _____, and to _____.”

3. Consider also God's choice of Abraham and Israel and how the controversy was fought through the story of Israel throughout the Old Testament.

Can you name some persons or incidents in the Old Testament that exemplify how this great controversy was fought?

4. The cross was the ultimate battleground. The victory there assures our victory. When Jesus said, "It is finished," He declared to the universe that Satan is forever a defeated foe. Sin has separated us from God. That's why Jesus came to this world to fight in the great controversy, to defeat sin and Satan, and to reconcile us with God. He longs to transform us. He hates the sin that pollutes us. Satan has perverted our minds and imaginations, degraded our souls until we are weak, lacking in moral strength. What is the solution to this terrible pollution, separation, and death?

Nuts & Bolts

What are some of the great issues in the great controversy?

1. The law of God is just and essential for God's governance in the universe.

Without the law, there can be no order in the universe. God's law reflects His character, and His character is love. Satan defies that law. God says that sin is "the transgression of the _____" (1 John 3:4). Satan charges that the law is arbitrary and affects human freedom. How can we be sure that this is a lie?

2. Obedience as an expression of love is a necessary part of belonging to God's family.

Satan accuses God of self-exaltation because He requires obedience to His law. Satan also charges that the law of God cannot be kept. It is arbitrary, too demanding, and too restrictive of human freedom. God, on the other hand, sent His Son, Jesus, to show to the universe that the law can be kept. That Jesus overcame Satan in the wilderness temptations (Matthew 4:4-10) and that He kept God's law while on earth and did not sin, is proof that obedience to God is possible.

Jesus said: "I have _____ my Father's _____ and _____ in His love" (John 15:10).

Peter says: Jesus " _____ no sin, neither was _____ found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22).

Paul adds: Jesus "became _____ unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8).

3. Christ's place in God's government.

From eternity Christ the Son is coexistent, coeternal, and coequal with God the Father. Satan disputed Christ's role and claimed that he instead should have Christ's place next to God. Can a creature take the place of Christ the Creator in the councils of heaven?

4. The Bible as God's authority and revealed will for human beings.

After the entrance of sin, God chose to reveal Himself through prophets and His messengers, and this revelation is recorded in the Bible (Hebrews 1:1-3). Throughout history, Satan has attacked the Bible. It is part of his scheme in the great controversy to lead men and women to distrust God's Word. On the other hand, Jesus showed that Scripture is the most effective weapon in winning the battles in the great controversy.

Matthew 4:10: "Man shall not live by _____ alone, but by every _____ that proceedeth out of the _____ of _____."

5. The most important issue: who Jesus is.

Jesus asked: "Who do _____ say that I, the Son of man _____?" (Matthew 16:13, 14). Peter answered, "Thou art the _____, the _____ of the living _____" (Matthew 16:16). Is Jesus fully God and equal with God the Father and God the Spirit in the Trinity? And is He fully human, identifying Himself with humans whom He came to save? The answer determines on which side of the great controversy we stand.

6. Truth apart from Jesus.

Satan attempts to convince people they can understand truth apart from Jesus, who is "the _____, the _____, and the _____" (John 14:6). In his hatred for Christ, Satan attempts to remove Christ not only from His rightful place in the universe but from the center of all biblical doctrines. Satan uses religious teachers (theologians) to suggest other centers of truth apart from Jesus. 1 John 2:18 predicts: "It is the _____ time: and as ye have heard that _____ shall come, even now are there many _____; whereby we know that it is the _____ time."

7. Total dependence on God—or self-dependence.

How can one have eternal life? Satan, through various religious systems and philosophies, cleverly presents that one can have eternal life by one's good works. Self can save itself, is the theme of Satan's deception. On the other hand, the Bible says, "Believe on the _____, and thou shalt be _____" (Acts 16:31). Self or Christ? Salvation by works or by faith?

8. The role of the cross.

Satan attempted to defeat the purpose of God on the cross. Satan tried to show that in the death of Jesus, he won a great victory. But at the cross, Jesus defeated Satan (Genesis 3:15; John 12:31 NIV). The death of Jesus on the cross became the means of our salvation: "For the _____ of the _____ is to them that perish, foolishness, but unto us which are _____, it is the _____ _____" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

9. What are some of the important issues in the great controversy that Christ's life, ministry, and death have proved to the onlooking universe?

a. God's Law can be obeyed.

Hebrews 4:15: "[He] was in _____ points _____ like as we are, yet without _____."

b. The entire universe will declare that God is fair.

Philippians 2:11: "And that every _____ should confess that _____ is Lord, to the _____ of God the _____."

c. Christ dying for our salvation would not only provide forgiveness and make heaven accessible to us, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan.

Write below the final victory song of the great controversy, as found in Revelation 15:3, 4:

d. Sin and evil will never arise again. Nahum 1:9: "He will make an utter end:

_____ shall not _____ up the _____ time."

e. Evil, cruelty, and suffering did not originate with God. He is not to blame for the world's misery.

"Thou hast loved _____, and hated _____" (Hebrews 1:9). The cross shows both the destructiveness of sin and the depths of God's love for sinners.

Words to Remember

Cosmic: Controversy involves the entire universe.

Antichrist: False christ, either an individual or a system, that stands in opposition to Christ.

Vindicate God: Establish that God is true and uphold His love and justice in the face of Satan's accusations.

Points to Ponder

Faith and presumption: Faith claims God's promises, trusts His love, accepts His salvation, and obeys His commands. Presumption is Satan's counterfeit of faith. It also claims God's promises, but uses them to reject God's commands and to hope God will save everyone, regardless.

Interpretation of the Bible:

There is the plain reading of the Scriptures as God's Word, using the Bible as its own interpreter. This method of interpretation may also include the Grammatical/Historical method which includes utilizing the tools of history, culture, linguistics, etc.

An alternative method of Biblical study is the Historical/critical method. This method employs the tools of history, culture, linguistics, etc. But with the presupposition of questioning the inspiration or authority of Scripture.

I Truly Believe

Sin is as uncontrollable as the South American "superbug," Chirimacha, that thrives on filth and garbage and multiplies at a fantastic rate. Immune to all kinds of poison, it lives for months without food or air. Worst of all, these large bugs are carriers of the rare, painful, and almost always fatal Chagas' disease. The poor have had to flee to higher elevations where the bugs can't live.

Likewise with sin. Our only hope is to flee higher to God. Knowing Jesus and living with Him each day leads to higher ground. There, we'll be able to grasp these great truths from the great controversy theme.

Mark those truths you wish to make the subject of your daily prayer.

[] I can choose to be like Jesus—hate sin and love the sinner.

[] Every day I must be aware of the tremendous battle that affects me and everyone else in the world.

[] Constantly, I will ask God to give me power to overcome, knowing I'm facing "spiritual hosts of wickedness" (Ephesians 6:12).

[] I realize that success is possible only through complete dependence on Jesus, who has promised me victory if I will put on the entire armor of God found in Ephesians 6:13-18.

My Prayer

Dear Father,

I thank You for revealing the conflict between good and evil. I rejoice that soon, the universe will acknowledge the power of God's transforming love. I realize my only hope of victory comes from Jesus. Thank You for the Holy Spirit, who will keep us true until the great controversy is forever ended. Amen.