

10. Paul and the Rebellion (1Q 2016—Rebellion and Redemption)

Biblical material: Rom. 5:12–21, 1 Cor. 3:12–17, 1 Cor. 12:14–26, Eph. 6:11–17, 1 Cor. 15:12–18; 54.

Quotes

- The thing worse than rebellion is the thing that causes rebellion. *Frederick Douglass*
- Rebellion against tyrants is obedience to God. *Benjamin Franklin*
- Those who will defend authority against rebellion must not themselves rebel. *J.R.R. Tolkien*
- Trust always defeats every rebellion. *Sunday Adelaja*
- A Christian who rebels against God’s Word is not a Christian at all. *Fritz Chery*
- Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. *C.S. Lewis*
- Whatever disunites man from God, also disunites man from man. *Edmund Burke*

Questions

How do the church problems that Paul had to deal with illustrate the issues in the Great Controversy? What of Paul’s own life as a demonstration of what God is dealing with in the cosmic conflict? How does God win rebels back to friends? If we persist in rebellion, what are the results?

Bible summary

Paul in Rom. 5:12–21 explains that death came through Adam and life through Christ. 1 Cor. 3:12–17 tells us that we are God’s temple. Similarly 1 Cor. 12:14–26 reveals that we are all part of one body. We are to put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:11–17). Our bodily resurrection is guaranteed by Jesus (1 Cor. 15:12–18; 54).

Comment

It is very clear that Paul sees the cosmic conflict very vividly. He writes that “We’re not fighting against human forces, but against supernatural rulers and powers, the dark lords of this world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.” (Eph. 6:12 FBV). When Saul—who-was-Paul met Jesus on the Damascus road, he had many decisions to make, many ideas to change, and much to learn. (That’s why he spent time in Arabia, far away from Jerusalem). He needed to work through the implications of this ‘paradigm shift.’ Most of all, this was a radical change in his picture of God. Instead of seeing a God who would delight in his persecution of Christians, he came to know the true God as revealed by Jesus.

But as for so many of us, he had to spend a long time thinking this through—and unlearning many ideas about God that he had been taught. Only then could he be a true ‘ambassador for Christ.’ For while he was previously very ‘zealous for God’ (Acts 22:3), he was zealous for the ‘god’ as portrayed by the adversary. This is a cautionary note for all of us—we may be very missionary minded, as was Saul before his conversion, but zeal and enthusiasm does not always correlate with truth!

As we think of Paul's experience, and the experience of hostility from his fellow-Jews, it's perhaps not surprising that it should become the clearer to Paul that the gospel was to go to the Gentiles as well. This really was a seismic shift in perspective—the more so for a 'Pharisee of the Pharisees'! But in the end he concludes "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" Acts 28:28 NIV.

After his own experience—and maybe because of it—Paul dedicated his life to taking God's good news beyond his own community. This meant dealing with a whole host of different issues, as well as having to maintain peace with his Jewish brethren. This too reflects many of the issues in the cosmic conflict—regarding what God really wants and how this is to be achieved. From dealing with legalists to those with lax morals to heathen concepts, Paul had to refer back to his own understanding of the character of God and what this meant in practice.

In going beyond what was understood as the borders of his faith community, Paul himself had to deal with charges of rebellion against God and religious authority. For example, his stand against circumcision was seen as a rejection of God's command. However Paul saw the truth of what God really wanted, recognizing that God was working in a whole new way to reach others, seeking a relationship that was based on love and commitment to the truth as revealed by Jesus.

Ellen White Comments

Paul had to meet the same spirit of opposition and blind prejudice. He preached first in the synagogue, reasoning from Moses and the prophets, showing what sins the Lord had most severely punished in olden times, and that murmuring and rebellion was the grievous crime that had brought God's displeasure upon the people of his choice. {LP 103}

The apostle Paul plainly states that the experience of the Israelites in their travels has been recorded for the benefit of those living in this age of the world, those upon whom the ends of the world are come. We do not consider that our dangers are any less than those of the Hebrews, but greater. There will be temptations to jealousies and murmurings, and there will be outspoken rebellion, as are recorded of ancient Israel. There will ever be a spirit to rise up against the reproof of sins and wrongs. But shall the voice of reproof be hushed because of this? If so, we shall be in no better situation than are the various denominations in our land who are afraid to touch the errors and prevailing sins of the people. {3T 358}

For what was the great controversy permitted to continue throughout the ages? Why was it that Satan's existence was not cut short at the outset of his rebellion? It was that the universe might be convinced of God's justice in His dealing with evil; that sin might receive eternal condemnation. In the plan of redemption there are heights and depths that eternity itself can never exhaust, marvels into which the angels desire to look. The redeemed only, of all created beings, have in their own experience known the actual conflict with sin; they have wrought with Christ, and, as even the angels could not do, have entered into the fellowship of His sufferings; will they have no testimony as to the science of redemption --nothing that will be of worth to unfallen beings? {Ed 308}