

9. The Great Controversy and the Early Church (1Q 2016—Rebellion and Redemption)

Biblical material: Acts 1:6–8, 2:5–12, Gen. 11:1–9, Acts 4:1–30, 7:54, 10:12–29.

Quotes

- Before Pentecost the disciples found it hard to do easy things; after Pentecost they found it easy to do hard things. *A. J. Gordon*
- We are commanded to have only one enemy, the devil. With him never be reconciled! But with a brother, never be at enmity in your heart. *Chrysostom*
- Your accumulated offenses do not surpass the multitude of God’s mercies; your wounds do not surpass the great physician’s skill. *Cyril of Jerusalem*
- The renewal of creation has been the work of the self-same Word that made it at the beginning. *Athanasias*
- Our task is not one of producing persuasive propaganda; Christianity shows its greatness when it is hated by the world. *Ignatius of Antioch*
- To fall in love with God is the greatest romance; to seek Him, the greatest adventure; to find Him, the greatest achievement. *Augustine*

Questions

What issues relevant to the Great Controversy do you see affecting the early church? How does the history of the early church reveal the ongoing conflict? What can we personally learn from the experiences of those in the early church? How do we relate to our current church knowing the Great Controversy issues are still at work?

Bible summary

In response to the disciples’ question about restoring the kingdom to Israel (showing they were still preoccupied with such issues!), Jesus tells them that they are to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:6–8). Acts 2:5–12 records how all those listening to the apostles heard them speaking in their own language—to counteract what happened at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9). Peter and John witness before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1–30). The same council stones Stephen (Acts 7:54). Peter’s vision and his visit to Cornelius’ home is recorded in Acts 10:12–29.

Comment

In the early church the great controversy and all its issues continues... In fact, after the revelation of God in Christ, the issues become so much clearer, and the church faces many challenges. However in the time of the Book of Acts the devil’s deceptions are not yet strong within the church.

The focus in those early days was to let as many people as possible hear the good news. The good news was the resurrected Lord, the author of our salvation. This was in strong contrast to the other ideas about “god” at the time—with both Greek and Roman mythology representing “gods” as being “superhuman” humans with even more vices ...

That God is not the kind of person Satan has made him out to be was the underlying theme of all this, the central conflict in the great controversy. As a consequence, God was seen with such greater clarity, and it is this recognition of God as

he is that brings spontaneous praise and worship. The evident delight of the early church in the good news made them willing to die for their beliefs, because God meant more to them than anything else! The mutual help, the house groups, and the true love they shared—all this is a consequence of their confidence in the goodness of God.

They embodied the kind of love that Paul spoke of: “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” 1 Cor. 13:4-7 NLT.

The early church had a wonderful communal experience that exemplified the purity of such interpersonal relationships. We’re called to be kind and compassionate to one another. Is this just a matter of keeping a command—doing what we are told because God says so—or is it far more a matter of sharing in the very nature of the selfless character of God? Only as we discover that God’s way is the only way, that right is right and makes such good sense, that we love to truly love—only then can we truly follow this command.

Can you imagine what it would be like to live in that kind of community? To be so other-centered, so unselfish, in a group committed to the true God? To truly be part of a church that is dedicated to sharing the truth of God and his healing love? Only as we come back to the true meaning of the church as the community of Jesus will we really experience God’s blessings through the church.

Ellen White Comments

There never will be a time in the history of the church when God’s worker can fold his hands and be at ease, saying, “All is peace and safety.” Then it is that sudden destruction cometh. Everything may move forward amid apparent prosperity; but Satan is wide-awake, and is studying and counseling with his evil angels another mode of attack where he can be successful. The contest will wax more and more fierce on the part of Satan; for he is moved by a power from beneath. As the work of God’s people moves forward with sanctified, resistless energy, planting the standard of Christ’s righteousness in the church, moved by a power from the throne of God, the great controversy will wax stronger and stronger, and will become more and more determined. Mind will be arrayed against mind, plans against plans, principles of heavenly origin against principles of Satan. Truth in its varied phases will be in conflict with error in its ever-varying, increasing forms, and which, if possible, will deceive the very elect. {TM 407}

By the facts unfolded in the progress of the great controversy, God will demonstrate the principles of His rules of government, which have been falsified by Satan and by all whom he has deceived. His justice will finally be acknowledged by the whole world, though the acknowledgment will be made too late to save the rebellious. God carries with Him the sympathy and approval of the whole universe as step by step His great plan advances to its complete fulfillment. He will carry it with Him in the final eradication of rebellion. It will be seen that all who have forsaken the divine precepts have placed themselves on the side of Satan, in warfare against Christ. When the prince of this world shall be judged, and all who have united with him shall share his fate, the whole universe as witnesses to the sentence will declare, “Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.” Revelation 15:3. {PP 79}

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