

12. The Cosmic Conflict Over God's Character (4Q 2013—The Sanctuary)

Biblical material: Ezek. 28:12–17, Isa. 14:12–15, Job 1:6–12, Zech. 3:1–5, 1 John 4:10, 2 Tim. 4:8, Ezek. 36:23–27; Revelation 16:7.

Quotes

- Our fall was, has always been, and always will be, that we aren't satisfied in God and what He gives. We hunger for something more, something other. *Ann Voskamp*
- We can build a relationship only with someone we really know. If we have wrong conceptions about a person, it will negatively affect our relationship with that person. The same is true in our relationship with God. In order to have a loving relationship with Him, we must truly understand His character... Sin did not start with a deed. Rather it began with accepting a wrong image of the character of God! The deed of taking the forbidden fruit was just a consequence of this wrong concept about God. *Michael Doernbrak*
- Christian theology can only be understood if we have incorporated a larger picture of a heavenly conflict that has spilled over to planet earth. What we will discover is that when we incorporate this cosmic conflict as a central theme that this adds a depth of understanding to every other Christian doctrine – including personal salvation. In fact, the extreme and radical way in which God won the universal conflict with Satan is the very same way in which God provided for our personal salvation. *Brad Cole*
- The New Testament writers also placed their theological analyses of specific passages within the larger context of the multiplex “grand central theme” or metanarrative of Scripture as set forth in the opening and closing pages of the Bible (Genesis 1–3; Revelation 20–22): creation and the original divine design for this world; the rise of the cosmic moral conflict (Great Controversy) over the character of God, in the setting of the sanctuary; the plan of redemption-restoration centering in Christ and His atoning work; and the eschatological judgment and end of sin at the climax of history. *Richard M. Davidson*
- For Christians, the Bible's highest value is in revealing Jesus, who gives us the highest, deepest, and most mature view of the character of the living God. *Brian McLaren*
- The problem facing the human family and the core issue in cosmic conflict theology center on the character of God. *Sigve Tonstad*
- The character and rule of God is manifested when instead of employing violence against his enemies to crush them, Jesus loves his enemies in order to redeem them. *Greg Boyd*

Questions

How do we understand this cosmic conflict—what are the real issues and how are they resolved? How do we respond when even people within our own faith community term such ideas “Adventist mythology”? How does God truly “win”? What is our part in all of this? How do we speak well of God—better still, demonstrate the truth about God?

Bible summary

Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 are vital passages describing the fall of Satan and his choice to oppose God. Job 1 also reveals some of the ongoing drama that is the great controversy. In a similar way to the situation with Job, Satan accuses Joshua the high priest. God calls for Joshua to be re-clothed and takes away his sin. The apostle John writes: “This is love! It’s not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and he sent his Son to be the reconciliation for our sins.” 1 John 4:10 FBV. Paul looks forward to receiving the crown of righteousness in 2 Tim. 4:8. God wishes to take away our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh (see Ezek. 36:23-27). John in Revelation 16:7 FBV says, “I heard a voice from the altar saying, ‘Yes, O Lord God, the All-powerful One, your judgments are right and true!’”

Comment

“We have been made a public show before the entire universe, to angels and to human beings.” 1 Corinthians 4:9 FBV. This statement leads immediately to the question as to what we have been made a public show for? For if we are here as part of God’s answer in the whole great controversy, then what is our message to be?

Revelation 12 and the war in heaven. Again we are entitled to ask what the war was about, and what did it demonstrate? We are in the middle of the ongoing war, playing a role in the great controversy. What are the universe-wide issues here?

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, 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 its 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,” 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: 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.

Our role here in the present is to help people think well of God, to understand his nature and character, and to see the much bigger picture that involves the whole universe! Without such a perspective, some of God's actions are hard to understand. We certainly do not have a monopoly on the truth, but this more expansive framework of the issues related to God, his use of power, and how he runs his government considerably enhances our understanding and role in the cosmic conflict.

Ellen White Comments

Make Plain the Issues in the Great Controversy.--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. Now, as never before, Satan is exercising his deceiving power to mislead and to destroy every unguarded soul. We are called upon to arouse the people to prepare for the great issues before them. We must give warning to those who are standing on the very brink of ruin. God's people are to put forth every power in combating Satan's falsehoods and pulling down his strongholds. 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. {PM 49}

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice--its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man--the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me." John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. {PP 68-9}

It is Satan's constant effort to misrepresent the character of God, the nature of sin, and the real issues at stake in the great controversy. His sophistry lessens the obligation of the divine law and gives men license to sin. At the same time he causes them to cherish false conceptions of God so that they regard Him with fear and hate rather than with love. The cruelty inherent in his own character is attributed to the Creator; it is embodied in systems of religion and expressed in modes of worship. Thus the minds of men are blinded, and Satan secures them as his agents to war against God. By perverted conceptions of the divine attributes, heathen nations were led to believe human sacrifices necessary to secure the favor of Deity; and horrible cruelties have been perpetrated under the various forms of idolatry. {GC 569}