

# **Growing in Christ**

## **The Great Controversy: The Foundation**

Lesson #1 for October 6, 2012

Scriptures: Genesis 3:15; Revelation 12:1-17; Isaiah 14:4-21; 53:6; Ezekiel 28:12-19; Romans 1:20-28; John 16:2.

1. This lesson will focus on the great controversy that has involved the entire universe since Satan rebelled in heaven and convinced our first parents to join his side. (Revelation 12:7-12)

In the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, belief #8 states:

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. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide flood. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.—*Fundamental Beliefs*, 8

2. Taking the Bible as a whole, we discover in Revelation 12:1-17 that the war—the conflict—began in heaven itself in the most holy place, right beside God's throne. Lucifer who was one of the covering cherubs began to feel jealous because he was not treated the same as Jesus Christ even though the two stood, seemingly to him as equals, on the two sides of God's throne. Before long, Lucifer suggested to other angels that he could run a better universe than God did. In his universe every angel would be allowed to govern himself—to do what he thought best. (Compare Judges 17:6; 21:25) In God's universe each individual is expected to act in a loving, kind way, reaching out to all around him.
3. After Satan was defeated and cast down to this earth, he demanded the right to have access to our first parents, Adam and Eve. God tried to protect them by limiting Satan to one tree in the garden although He did place that tree in the center of the garden near the tree of life. (Genesis 2:17; 3:3) He severely warned our first parents. But in her curiosity, Eve wandered too close and found herself engaged in a conversation and was tempted to eat of the fruit which she soon handed to her husband who ate it as well. (Genesis 3) Why didn't all those who sinned recognize the results beforehand?
4. Fortunately, long before this earth was created, God had made a plan to cover this contingency. But, look back at what happened between the serpent and Eve at the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God had said that sin leads to death. (Genesis 2:15-17) As soon as he had opportunity, Satan responded by saying, "That is a lie!" (Genesis 3:1-5) Although we do not know what Lucifer/Satan said to the angels in heaven, those words from his conversation with Eve give us a hint. How did Satan "sugarcoat" his deception? The basic issue was, "Who is telling us the truth? Can God be trusted"?
5. Rightly or wrongly, in our day when we talk about these issues, we strongly bias the response by calling one side God's side and the other side Satan's side. Was that clear to the angels who first rebelled in heaven? Did they really think that by joining Satan's side they were calling God a liar? And what about us today? Is there any question in our minds about who—God or Satan—is telling us the truth? When we are tempted to sin, do we clearly and correctly identify the two voices speaking in our heads as God and Satan? If the time ever comes when we are not sure whether a given voice in our head is that of God or Satan, how will we determine who it is?
6. No doubt, Satan thought he had nearly won the great controversy—at least here on this

earth—when God suddenly sent the flood. (Genesis 6-8) By rescuing Noah and his family, God preserved the one small group of people that was still listening to Him! About one more generation of evil and not a single person would have been left here on earth who would have been listening to God.

7. It is fairly easy—if you accept the fact that the Bible is giving us a historical account—to trace the work of Satan and God down through the generations. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Ellen White has done a marvelous job of expanding that understanding in her *Conflict of the Ages* series.
8. What we learn in reviewing all of this is that Satan has done everything possible to picture God as the One who is arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving, and severe, even a tyrant—attributes which are the very characteristics that describe Satan’s nature and his kingdom. So, why does anyone believe those charges made by Satan? And what has been God’s response to those attacks?
9. The usual Christian response is that God has dealt with Satan’s accusations by repeatedly defeating the Devil in various conflicts.
10. But, we know that God and the Devil do not fight with guns or even nuclear weapons. What are the weapons in that war? God can only use truth and evidence. Satan uses lies, deception, accusations, false implications, and every other deceitful device of which he can think. He twists the truth! So, on any given occasion, how are we supposed to know which side is speaking? Is it always obvious who is telling the truth and who is lying and deceiving? Remember that the day is coming when Satan himself will arrive here on planet earth claiming that he is the Son of God. And he will use the same kinds of methods that Jesus used to prove His messiahship when He was here on this earth: miracles, the words of Scripture, and the influence of what might seem to some like a holy spirit. But, there are certain things that must always be remembered. Truth must always be consistent with itself.
11. Satan’s basic weapon is selfishness. God’s basic weapon is love.
12. But, what about that question asked at the tree back in the Garden of Eden? Does sin lead to death? Or, doesn’t it? If we look around us, recognizing that every one of us is a sinner, we would have to admit that there are not many people who are obviously dying of sin right at this point. So, maybe Satan was right! But when the right time came, (Galatians 4:4) God sent His Son to this earth to answer most of Satan’s accusations and questions in His one lifetime. When Jesus died on the cross, it was not death from crucifixion. He died within six hours. Death from crucifixion takes a long time. Did Jesus really die? When they stuck a spear into His side, they discovered that He was already dead. Satan had also claimed that when people do die, they die because God is angry at them for disobeying Him and that God kills them. Did God kill Jesus? Jesus certainly did not cry out, “My God, my God, why are you killing Me?” No! He said, “My God, my God, why did you abandon me?” (Matthew 27:46, *GNB*)
13. Perhaps the scariest part of all was that the people who were so determined to have Christ dead were doing it in God’s name. How could that happen? Were they confused about whose side they were on in the great controversy? Absolutely! Could it happen again? Who from the past are Seventh-day Adventists most like? Aren’t we most like the Pharisees? They were Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, health-reforming “adventists”! (They were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah.)
14. Revelation 12:17 tells us very clearly that Satan with his immense intelligence and all of his demonic assistants—while realizing that their fate was sealed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—also know that by misleading and deceiving human beings, they have been able to delay the second coming of Jesus Christ almost 2000 years! What will it take to bring that deception to an end? Do we need to understand very clearly what the issues are in the great controversy? Consider the following quotations from Scripture and Ellen White.
15. We are the theater of the universe. (1 Corinthians 4:9) Beings from all over the universe are watching us: Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:4-7; Daniel 9:21,22; Acts 12:7; Hebrews 13:2; compare

Revelation 22:16; 1 Peter 5:8,9; 2 Peter 1:19; Ephesians 1:9,10; 3:9,10; Colossians 1:19,20; James 4:7.

16. God needs to clear His name in order to win the great controversy.

Ezekiel 20 and 36 are very instructive chapters. They should be read carefully, and the implications must be considered. Please note this particular theme.

In Egypt: Read Ezekiel 20:4-7 about how God tried to help Israel in Egypt, then note what God said:

**Ezekiel 20:8,9 (GNB):** <sup>8</sup> “But they defied me and refused to listen. They did not throw away their disgusting idols or give up the Egyptian gods. I was ready to let them feel the full force of my anger there in Egypt. <sup>9</sup> But I did not, since **that would have brought dishonor to my name**, for in the presence of the people among whom they were living I had announced to Israel that I was going to lead them out of Egypt....

In the wilderness: Read Ezekiel 20:10-12, then note what God said:

**Ezekiel 20:13-14 (GNB):** <sup>13</sup> “But even in the desert they defied me. They broke my laws and rejected my commands, which bring life to anyone who obeys them. They completely profaned the Sabbath. I was ready to let them feel the force of my anger there in the desert and to destroy them. <sup>14</sup> But I did not, since **that would have brought dishonor to my name among the nations which had seen me lead Israel out of Egypt....** [See Exodus 32:7-14]

The second generation in the wilderness: Read Ezekiel 20:15-20, then note what God said:

**Ezekiel 20:21-22 (GNB):** <sup>21</sup> “But that generation also defied me. They broke my laws and did not keep my commands, which bring life to anyone who obeys them. They profaned the Sabbath. I was ready to let them feel the force of my anger there in the desert and to kill them all. <sup>22</sup> But I did not, **since that would have brought dishonor to my name among the nations which had seen me bring Israel out of Egypt....**

After the Babylonian captivity: Read Ezekiel 20:37-42, then note what God said:

**Ezekiel 20:43-44 (GNB):** <sup>43</sup> “Then you will remember all the disgraceful things you did and how you defiled yourselves. You will be disgusted with yourselves because of all the evil things you did. <sup>44</sup> **When I act to protect my honor, you Israelites will know that I am the LORD, because I do not deal with you as your wicked, evil actions deserve.**” The Sovereign LORD has spoken.

Throughout Israelite history, God has had to act, not primarily for the “salvation” of His people but for the honor of His Own Name! The great controversy is not so much about how God saves you and me (Would that be a selfish approach to salvation?) but about how God answers Satan’s accusations against His character and government. When the controversy is over, everyone will agree that God has done everything possible to save everyone without interfering with free will.

**Note especially that the purpose of the Sabbath is to remind us of this particular very important truth. The Sabbath is to be a time when we get to know our God and are reminded of our relationship with Him.** (Ezekiel 20:12,20) We need to understand His character and as much about Him as possible—not just the right name by which to refer to Him. If the Sabbath is not being used for this purpose, we are profaning it as far as God is concerned. (Ezekiel 20:13-21)

In Ezekiel 36 after all of Israel was in captivity, He explained further:

**Ezekiel 36:20-36 (GNB):** <sup>20</sup> “**Wherever they went, they brought disgrace on my holy name, because people would say, ‘These are the people of the LORD, but they had to leave his land.’** <sup>21</sup> That made me concerned for my holy name, since the Israelites brought disgrace on it everywhere

they went.

<sup>22</sup> Now then, give the Israelites the message that I, the Sovereign LORD, have for them: **What I am going to do is not for the sake of you Israelites, but for the sake of my holy name**, which you have disgraced in every country where you have gone. <sup>23</sup> When I demonstrate to the nations the holiness of my great name—the name you disgraced among them—**then they will know that I am the LORD....** (<sup>28</sup>) You will be my people, and I will be your God.... <sup>32</sup> Israel, I want you to know that **I am not doing all this for your sake....** <sup>36</sup> Then the neighboring nations that have survived will know that I, the LORD, rebuild ruined cities and replant waste fields. I, The LORD, have promised that I would do this—and I will.”

Isaiah also realized and stated in Scripture that God’s reputation was the key issue.

**Isaiah 48:11 (GNB):**

<sup>11</sup> “What I do is done **for my own sake—**  
**I will not let my name be dishonored**  
or let anyone else share the glory  
that should be mine and mine alone.”

In **Daniel 9:14-19**, Daniel recognized that God must do something for His Own reputation.

17. Ellen White expanded on this theme from Scripture.

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. *Patriarchs and Prophets* 68.2-69.0 (1890); *Reflecting Christ* 50.3,4 (1985)

To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, “It is finished,” had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished.... Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion. *The Desire of Ages* 758.3 (1898); *RC* 60.4; compare *ST* (Aug. 27, 1902, par. 11); *TA* 205.1

18. ***The security of the universe was even more important to God than the salvation of man.***

It was in order that the heavenly universe might see the conditions of the covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race. **The throne of Justice must be eternally and forever made secure, even tho the race [the human race] be wiped out, and another creation populate the earth.** By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, all doubts would be forever settled, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. Christ alone could restore honor to God’s government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped.... Who is able to describe the last

scenes of Christ's life on earth, His trial in the judgment hall, His crucifixion? Who witnessed these scenes?—The heavenly universe, God the Father, Satan and his angels. *The Signs of the Times*, July 12, 1899, par. 2 (4ST 44:1:2); compare *LHU* 257.2

19. ***Christ died for sinless angels too.***

That which alone can effectually restrain from sin in this world of darkness, will prevent sin in heaven. The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels.... **The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven** (*BTS* December 1, 1907).... The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. *The Signs of the Times*, December 30, 1889, par. 4; (2ST 345:1:1); *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1132.8,9; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7a, p. 252; *TA* 205.2,3; *Our High Calling* 45.4; *The Home Missionary* May 1, 1897; compare *7ABC* 476.3

20. ***Why the angels needed the “message of the cross”:***

For centuries God looked with patience and forbearance upon the cruel treatment given to his ambassadors, at his holy law prostrate, despised, trampled underfoot. He swept away the inhabitants of the Noachian world with a flood. But when the earth was again peopled, men drew away from God, and renewed their hostility to him, manifesting bold defiance. Those whom God rescued from Egyptian bondage followed in the footsteps of those who had preceded them. Cause was followed by effect; the earth was being corrupted.

A crisis had arrived in the government of God.... All heaven was prepared at the word of God to move to the help of his elect. One word from him, and the bolts of heaven would have fallen upon the earth, filling it with fire and flame. God had but to speak, and there would have been thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes and destruction.

The heavenly intelligences were prepared for a fearful manifestation of Almighty power. Every move was watched with intense anxiety. The exercise of justice was expected. The angels looked for God to punish the inhabitants of the earth....

The heavenly universe was amazed at God's patience and love. To save fallen humanity the Son of God took humanity upon himself. *Review and Herald*, July 17, 1900, par. 4-7; (*4RH* 201:1:4-201:2:1) compare *Desire of Ages* 37; compare *MS* 22, January 10, 1890; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* 569.3-570.0

21. ***The controversy is over the character of God.***

From the beginning it has been Satan's studied plan to cause men to forget God, that he might secure them to himself. Hence he has sought to misrepresent the character of God, to lead men to cherish a false conception of Him. The Creator has been presented to their minds as clothed with the attributes of the prince of evil himself,—as arbitrary, severe, and unforgiving,—that He might be feared, shunned, and even hated by men. Satan hoped to so confuse the minds of those whom he had deceived that they would put God out of their knowledge. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 738; *In Heavenly Places*, 8; *Review and Herald* February 15, 1912

22. **The great controversy will not be over until we unselfishly recognize that the primary issue is not about us and how we can be saved, but rather, it is about God and His reputation.**

Multitudes have a wrong conception of God and His attributes, and are as truly serving a false god as were the worshipers of Baal. (*RH*, November 6, 1913 par. 1; *PK* 177.1)

23. What about us? Do we have a correct picture of God and His character? A correct understanding of the great controversy is the distinctive doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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