



Last Generation for Christ Publications

P.O. Box 1011

Ukiah, CA 95482

www.lastgenerationforchrist.org

info@lastgenerationforchrist.org • (805) 729-1754

Copyright © 2024

Last Generation for Christ Publications

The Great Controversy and The Final Hour of Destiny

By Fred Dana

September 11, 2001 was a day America will never forget. When the World Trade Center towers collapsed, people wondered how such evil could be in the hearts of men. *Why did God allow it to happen?*

This question is not new. Remember Hitler and Nazism? What was a young, robust Jewish girl to think when she survived, but her whole family—even aunts, uncles, cousins—did not? Millions of Jews, German soldiers and civilians, Russians, and soldiers of other nations, all dead...for what purpose? Where was God then?

Some of the greatest philosophical questions of all time are, “Why is there evil in the world?” and “How can the existence of evil be explained if God is loving and all powerful as the Bible claims”? How could God allow such pain? Why

does He let people suffer from cancer? What about abuse of children?

A loving, all-powerful God would stop evil...unless He really isn't all that loving. Doesn't He care about poor, suffering humanity? Also, a loving, all-powerful God would stop evil...unless He isn't all-powerful. Isn't He strong enough to stop evil and suffering?

Unable to find a satisfactory explanation for suffering and evil, many have decided that the Bible's claim of an all-powerful, all-loving God is wishful thinking passed down from an ignorant culture of the ancient past. Therefore, the Bible is rejected as untrustworthy. *The Bible does have the answers, however!* People simply have not seen those answers yet. To help people grasp the Bible's answers, God gave visions to a woman named Ellen White, revealing the big picture of God's dealing with the problem of evil. She called this big picture, "The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan."¹

¹ Where is the Great Controversy in Ellen White's writings? *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapter 1, *The Desire of Ages*, chapters 3 and 79, *The Great*

What Are the Main Issues in The Great Controversy?

Throughout the Great Controversy, Satan has made three basic, deceptive claims against God. God has provided amazing answers to each of these major deceptions, and the third answer will come into focus in the last days involving His true followers.² That is the final hour of destiny!

All three of Satan's false claims are attacks on the nature and character of God. Before we tackle how the Great Controversy started, it's essential to grasp what the Bible reveals about the nature of God. This will give vital context for understanding the rebellion against God. Also, it's only logical that some issues will come to a climax at the end. After all, if each claim against God were already fully answered, wouldn't God

Controversy, Chapter 29. Other chapters of *The Great Controversy*, and the first three chapters of *The Story of Redemption* have more details.

² Years ago, John Wood presented this three-deception concept in his Gift of Prophecy classes at Atlantic Union College.

have ended this mess by now? Something obviously isn't settled; something is not finished. But what?

Let's start at the beginning and get to know who God really is.

Who Is God?

1. Is God bound by time? "I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done" (Isaiah 46:9-10). This means:

He that rules in the heavens is one who sees the end from the beginning—the one before whom the mysteries of the past and the future, are alike outspread (Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 43.)

In essence, this means that God can see the past and the future in the present. Therefore, one aspect of God's nature is that He is not bound by time; He can be outside of time, in a sense, looking in. No one else is like this. All

other beings are created in and bound by time.

2. How old is God? Psalm 90:2 says, *“from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.”* God’s existence is totally beyond any measurement in time!
3. How smart is God? Isaiah 40:28 says, *“There is no searching of His understanding.”* God’s knowledge is totally beyond any measurement of any kind. He’s omniscient, all-knowing.
4. Is God bound by space? “It is He that sits upon the circle of the earth...that stretches out the heavens as a curtain, and spreads them out as a tent to dwell in” (Isaiah 40:22).

Picture all the galaxies, hundreds of light years across an endless expanse. To God, it is like curtains he can open or close. And to *“spread”* out the heavens *“as a tent to dwell in”* pictures the universe as a tent which God can go in and out as He wishes.

In Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the Temple, he asked how God could dwell in a house man built for Him.

Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; much less this house which I have built! (2 Chronicles 6:18).

God is beyond the confines of space. The universe is infinite to us, but not so to God, who created it all.

5. How powerful is God? *“For the Lord God omnipotent reigns,”* (Revelation 19:6). Omnipotent means having all power. Only God is omnipotent. His power is infinite beyond measure.
6. Where is God? *“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or...flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell [sheol, the grave], behold, thou art there. If I...dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me”* (Psalm 139:7-10). God can be present everywhere at once. This means that God can hear millions of prayers simultaneously, even before we ask.

Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear (Isaiah 65:24).

Aren't you glad God is omnipresent and omniscient? He knows our thoughts before we speak. Job 42:2 says, "*...no thought can be withholden from Thee.*"

7. How much does God love? There are all kinds of evidence of God's love, most notably creation, the life of Jesus, and His great sacrifice for redemption from sin. When we see Jesus on the cross, we can only conclude God's love is beyond measure (John 3:16). He is all loving!³

The nature of God described in the Bible is of an infinite being totally beyond measure of any kind. He created and rules over time and space and can be outside or inside of either one as He decides. Could any created being ever be equal to God? Is anyone or anything besides God Himself infinite by the definition established in the Bible? Not even

³ 1 John 4:9-10, 2 Corinthians 9:15.

close! *“I am the Lord, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me”* (Isaiah 45:5). Our conclusion must be that only God is infinite!

How Could the Angels Understand God?

In the distant past God created angels. How could these limited, finite creatures understand the infinite, immeasurable Creator? They wouldn't naturally understand His power, know that He could read their thoughts, and comprehend His eternal nature or the depth of His amazing love.

God had to reveal Himself on their level. To explain it all at once would have been impossible, along the lines of a two-year-old entering medical school. *Some things just take time and maturity to learn.* First, God had to give them an idea of His power and majesty. Created beings needed to learn that He was the supreme being in the universe deserving of their allegiance. He alone was the Creator, the source of life.

How did the angels see God's power and authority? We know from 1 Timothy 6:16 that “[God] *only has immortality, dwelling in light*

which no man can approach.” In Bible History God has sometimes shown Himself as the light unapproachable, His glory appearing as a fire. Hebrews 12:29 says, “*Our God is a consuming fire.*” God was a fire in the burning bush of Exodus 3 and on Mt. Sinai where approaching was forbidden.⁴ Ezekiel, Daniel, and John also saw God as a burning fire.⁵

The Shekinah Glory over the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant in the earthly sanctuary corresponded to the glory of God in light unapproachable on His throne up in heaven. This means the angels could view God on His throne in a glorious light, and when they looked at Him, “*Radiant...light [was] ever flowing from His presence*” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 34). They were in awe of His splendor and majesty.

Why was it necessary for God the Father to dwell in light unapproachable before the angels? Because created beings needed to know they should always be in full cooperation. To resist the source of life is to choose death.

⁴ Exodus 19:18, 24:17 and Exodus 19:11-12, 23.

⁵ Ezekiel 1:26-28, Daniel 7:9, Revelation 1:14.

But was this a sufficient understanding of God for finite creatures? What would the angels *not* understand if the glorious light was all they knew about God? Could they understand love? Could they relate to a light or fire they could not even approach? The glorious light of the eternal Father was necessary — but not enough.

There had to be a way for angels to relate to God and know His incredible love. For love to have a meaningful expression, God needed to be seen as a person like them. Here we encounter the miracle of the Godhead. God the Son was an angel like them – Michael the Archangel.⁶

⁶ God the Son, Michael, and Jesus are all the same person. Jude 9 tells us the archangel's name is Michael. In John 5:25, 28, Jesus, referring to Himself, said "*the voice of the Son of God*" would raise the dead. Paul wrote in 1 Thess. 4:16 that when the Lord comes, there'll be "*the voice of the archangel, and...the dead in Christ shall rise.*" So, the Son (Jesus) and Michael the archangel both call the dead to life. These names are simply titles and roles taken by the same being.

It was necessary that God the Son be an angel so the created beings could approach Him, communicate directly, and experience the love in His eyes and voice. However, if the Son, as Michael the Archangel, was the only manifestation of God, they would see God as just like themselves. They needed to see the Father as the unapproachable light to grasp His power, and they needed to see the Son as an angel to grasp His love.

The dynamic of the Godhead reveals the key principle of God's government. God the Son's submission and obedience to the Father modeled the spirit of selfless service, self-sacrificing love. If all created beings followed Michael's example, there would be happiness and peace forevermore. This was the law of heaven, the essence of God Himself.

What about the Holy Spirit? Did He have a role way back then? The Old Testament teaches of the Holy Spirit,⁷ but much more understanding came later in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit

⁷ Genesis 1:2, Exodus 31:3, Psalm 51:11, Isaiah 63:10, Ezekiel. 36:26.

becomes more prominent for understanding during later stages of the Great Controversy. For now, it should be noted that the Holy Spirit is an invisible person who simultaneously works *in the minds* of billions of created beings. He guides by conscience and reason. He is very personal, but still clearly beyond our grasp because He also is the eternal, infinite God beyond all measure, yet small enough to dwell in our hearts.⁸

The Origin of Evil

Rebellion against an infinite God seems quite senseless, doesn't it? Could a rebel think of anything that God wouldn't already know he was thinking? Could he catch God by surprise in any way? God is way too smart and powerful! Besides, there is no valid reason to rebel against God. A God of infinite love, wisdom, and power knows how to meet every need we have. He

⁸ For an in-depth study of the Godhead see *The God We Worship* by Daniel Scarone, Pacific Press, Nampa, ID, 2011 and *The Godhead: Finding Solutions* by Vance Ferrell, Harvestime Books, Altamont, TN, 2022 (call 931-692-2777).

loves us! Because God is omnipresent, He will “never leave” us “or forsake” us (Hebrews 13:5). You can trust Him with all your heart.

But, Isaiah 14:12-14 says “Lucifer” tried to “exalt” himself above God. Ezekiel 28:14-17 explains that Satan had once been “the anointed cherub that covers.” Lucifer was the highest created angel standing next to the throne of God in heaven. He was “created perfect” until he chose “iniquity.” A proud heart corrupted him. Ego and the quest for power changed him. But how could an angel that was created perfect and happy become proud and rebellious?

It started as innocent wonderings. Since angels are created beings, they learned over time by instruction and experience as all created beings learn. The book *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapter one, tells the sad story.

Lucifer didn't grasp God's infinite nature. No created being could. When Lucifer had questions, God gave him the answers he needed to choose sensibly. Unfortunately, instead of rejoicing in the truth, he chose to let his pride make him insolent and rebellious.

Lucifer's primary question was rooted in doubt that Michael the Archangel was really God in bodily form as a person (Colossians 3:9). To Lucifer, Michael was an angel just like himself, and as such, he concluded that God had put Michael above him. Was it favoritism? Why Michael had been exalted above him?

God's Answer – Lucifer's Response

Before Lucifer's thinking became rebellion, innocent discussions and questions among the angels on many topics naturally led to positive learning moments. God welcomes sincere questions. Knowing their thoughts, He knew when they were ready to learn more. It was time.

God called the billions of angels before the throne. The Father spoke from the light unapproachable, something like the following: "Michael, your commander whom you have always loved, has always loved you as I love you. However, Michael is more than an angel. He is one in nature, character, and purpose with Me."

Was there tangible evidence that this was true? Proof that Michael was equal to God the Father was that Michael walked right into the

light unapproachable. Yes, the son “shared The Father’s throne, and the glory of the eternal, self-existent One encircled both” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 36). No angel could do that!

God the Father explained that Michael was their creator and deserved their homage and allegiance just as He did. Then it was announced that God the Son would create the earth with new special beings. Billions of angels burst out singing praises to God, bowing before both the Father and the Son. The angels saw Michael with the Father together in spectacular glory and could now anticipate watching their beloved Michael engage in an amazing creation.

How did Lucifer respond? Initially, he was swept up into the praise and worship of both the Father and the Son. He had witnessed a powerful revelation of truth. After some time, however, he allowed pride and jealousy to agitate his thoughts. Lucifer ultimately rejected the revelation God had given about the Son’s infinite qualities as Creator. He resumed thinking the Father had unfairly exalted Michael. Essentially, Lucifer chose not to accept reality. He wanted to be exalted above Michael, which was impossible.

Lucifer left his own exalted position as covering cherub to seek sympathy among friends. Since the angels were completely happy, he had to appear loyal to God, intending only to improve things through the questions raised. The more angels seemed to take his side, the stronger Lucifer thought he was becoming. But even if he had gotten them all on his side, that would not have made him stronger than God. He had to deny the infinite qualities of God's nature to believe that he was getting stronger than God.

Finding Fault with The Law of Heaven

What other issues did Lucifer use to win over the angels? He challenged God's law. Since we are used to seeing pride and self-promotion in our earthly organizations, the law of heaven is difficult to grasp. As noted earlier, it was simply the law of selfless love. Obedience to God was based on love and trust in Him. Submission and obedience to the Almighty One didn't feel restrictive at all to happy, perfect beings. They were so content serving God and one another that they were scarcely aware of God's law. It was a privilege to follow His commands.

Lucifer tried to raise doubts in conversations. If angels were perfect, wasn't their wisdom sufficient? Why did they need a law over them? Could it be about exalting Michael over them and requiring submission to Him? *His obvious conclusion was "God is unfair to impose a law over us."*

However, if God created everything, it all belongs to Him. He naturally has authority as the infinite Creator! His law actually describes how He made everything to work for the happiness of all His creation. It's about how love works. The law is really a description of God Himself, for "God is love" (1 John 4:8). A law based on love for us is for our best good and has nothing unfair about it.

Angel Debates

Can you picture the angels trying to sort out Lucifer's sentiments? He held a high position, and they had always followed his commands. They loved and trusted him. Angels had never before heard insinuations, distortions of truth, or lies. They didn't even know what a lie was.

Some angels pointed out that God had showed them that Michael had always been one with the Father, that He was their Creator. Others questioned how that could be. After all, He was an angel like them.

Discord permeated those discussions. It all came down to one point -- did they believe that Michael, the Son of God, was really one in nature with the Father? If the Son was not eternal, if He was a created being, there was favoritism and arbitrary rule over them, and God the Father Himself was unfair to exalt Michael over them.

What Could God Do for Lucifer?

With the Holy Spirit working in the mind of each angel, the most receptive ones began to see how terrible the end result would be for the disaffected ones and pleaded with them to retain their loyalty to God. The Holy Spirit also convinced Lucifer that he was in the wrong. God gave Lucifer a picture of the future to try to prevent his rebellion (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 39). God truly showed amazing love and patience!

But pride doesn't care about the facts. "Again and again, he was offered pardon on condition of repentance and submission" (Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, 496). His thoughts might have gone like this: "Should I give up these bad feelings and just be happy again? Or...no, that wouldn't be happy; that would be a humiliating defeat." "He nearly reached the decision to return, but pride forbade him" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 39, See also Ezekiel 28:17).

Reading the thoughts of every angel, God knew of their intense division. Lucifer interpreted God's patience as weakness, evidence he was gaining advantage, even winning. Lucifer imagined that God was yielding to his superior cunning. Yet, God knew Lucifer's thoughts.

War In Heaven

Lucifer finally came out openly in his rebellion, sure that most of the angels were with him. At this point, he became Satan! Can you picture him announcing his government that wouldn't require submission to Michael or God's law? When loyal angels protested, he denounced them as slaves, but they pointed out that One

powerful enough to create them all could certainly overthrow them and punish them.

Neutrality was impossible. The circumstances forced every angel to make a full and final decision. Rebellion had reached full maturity. Revelation 12: 7-9 says, *“There was war in heaven; Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels.”* The dragon, Satan the devil, and his angels *“were cast out”* of heaven.

Imagine the anguish in the loss of great friendships. Bonds of pure love and respect could not be severed so suddenly. God’s loyal angels felt real sympathy for those expelled and had unsettled questions. Why had there been conflict where there had once been perfect harmony?

Did Lucifer have a good excuse for rebelling? No. He was willful in misunderstanding God the Son’s infinite nature and rightful place. God showed him enough evidence for him to make the right decision, the same evidence that was enough for billions of loyal angels. God used everything except force. Lucifer freely made his own stubborn choice. All the evil angels sinned, rebelled in the full glory of heaven. *There was*

nothing else that God could do to change their minds. They had scorned every opportunity God had given them.

Michael's true position was God, but Satan said it was just favoritism. And because God has a law, Satan said it was unjustly imposed upon them. His conclusion? **Deception #1: God is an unfair, unjust, arbitrary tyrant.**⁹

A quick and full answer wasn't possible. The nature of sin and rebellion would take time to understand. Only sufficient understanding would allow freedom of choice to continue. As we have already seen, Satan's first deception has brought confusion still today. People have asked why a loving, all-powerful God would permit evil, suffering, and pain in our world. Is God in some way unfair?

What Is God's Answer to Deception #1?

In order to prove Satan's deception a lie, *God's true character of love must be proven over*

⁹ All of these terms are used in various places in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapter one, to describe Satan's accusations.

time and events. From creation to Calvary; from the pre-advent judgment in heaven to the 144,000 and last day events; from the second coming to the end of the millennium, God's character will be exonerated and glorified. And Satan's character as a liar and deceiver, the cause of strife, evil, suffering, and war will be finally and fully unmasked. What do we call all these years and events that settle the issues? The Great Controversy.¹⁰ The Great Controversy will prove Satan's deception is false and vindicate God, proving He is not an unfair, unjust, arbitrary tyrant.

Many have asked, "Why didn't God destroy Satan to prevent the outbreak of evil?" But that would have resulted in angels obeying God out of fear. "Question or accuse God, and you get terminated." True love and trust can't exist with that kind of fear. Love would cease to be freely chosen. Freedom of choice would basically be gone. Since God's governing principle is love, that

¹⁰ For a fuller explanation see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pgs. 42-43 and *The Great Controversy*, pgs. 498-499.

kind of fear was not acceptable to Him. For love to be love, it has to come from freedom of the will. “Perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).

Think about it. If Satan were destroyed today, would all evil suddenly stop? No! People are free moral agents. People that desire sinful ways and practices will just continue. Selfish people will still be selfish. Sin is like a cancer. It’s not so much that the devil controls sin, but that sin controls him. Even though the devil is the chief agitator of sin, evil is bigger than he is.

Certainly, the time will come for the devil to be destroyed.¹¹ Our all loving, all-powerful God must end all suffering, evil, and death. He will restore complete harmony to His universe.

Here’s an amazing truth about the second person of the Godhead. To be convinced that God was fair with them, angels believed that Michael was fully one with God the Father. Belief in the Son of God was the redeeming factor, and it still is today! Angels who had never sinned were saved by faith in the Son of God. He’s

¹¹ Ezekiel 28:16-19, Matthew 25:41, Revelation 20:10.

always been the way to salvation, “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). There has never been any other way.

The War Comes to Planet Earth

Genesis 1 tells that God created the earth with all its systems and species over six literal days, resting on the seventh day. The New Testament declares that everything created was created by the Son, by Jesus the Word of God (Hebrews 1:2-3, Colossians 1:16-17, John 1:1-3, 14). Imagine the reaction of the onlooking angels as they watched their beloved Michael create. *“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.... For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast”* (Psalm 33:6, 9). Just imagine the rejoicing and praising of God on the first Sabbath on our earth.¹²

What does creation of the earth and mankind have to do with the war between good and evil, between Michael and Satan? Michael’s creative

¹² Job 38:4-7; Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, 281.

ability demonstrated to the angels that God the Son was equal with God the Father. Michael spoke things into existence. No angel could do that, but only the infinite, Almighty God. Satan's pride took a blow. He quickly felt hatred for the first inhabitants of the earth.

We know the sad story of the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Satan used deception #1 on Eve. He convinced her that God was being unfair to withhold fruit that would make her as wise as God. She adopted Satan's spirit of disaffection and desire for self-exaltation. It was self-promotion versus the law of self-sacrificing love.

When Adam and Eve sinned, Satan brought forth another deception. He said that since God's law "was changeless, and its penalty could not be remitted, every transgressor must be forever debarred from the Creator's favor. He had claimed that the sinful race were placed beyond redemption" (*The Great Controversy*, 502). He claimed that God and His law were at fault. His conclusion? **Deception #2: God Cannot or Will Not Forgive.**

This attack on God's character has a new distinct point. Satan claimed that God and His

government may be just but there was no mercy. God's law was too hard, that God's justice is greater than His mercy. That's why He cannot or will not forgive. This is an outgrowth of deception #1. After all, what else would you expect from an unfair tyrant?

Satan probably thought he had God trapped. If God would forgive Adam and Eve, wouldn't He have to forgive Satan and His angels? What then? Could they return to heaven? If not, wouldn't God lose the human race?

But there was a big difference between the sins of Satan and that of Adam and Eve. Lucifer had sinned in the full light of the glory of heaven. There was nothing left that could change his mind. But Adam and Eve were deceived, and God could reveal many things to influence their choices. Satan no longer had the capacity for repentance. His choice was final. His heart was hard as stone. He could only be sorry for lost privileges, but Adam and Eve could actually be sorry for their sin. God could lead them to experience a deep repentance.

What Was God's Answer to Deception #2?

Adam and Eve found hope in God's words in Genesis 3:15. A deliverer was promised to defeat Satan. It wasn't clear how it would happen, but Christians know the answer to the second deception was found on Calvary! Nothing proves God's incredible willingness to forgive our sins like Jesus' amazing sacrifice of Himself for our redemption! The Son of God paid the penalty for sin on our behalf.

The Messianic promises are the theme of the Old Testament, and the fulfillment of those promises through Jesus Christ are the theme of the New Testament. But why did it take 4000 years for Jesus to come? Why have 2000 more years gone by since? Why hasn't Jesus come yet the second time to rescue His people from this sin-ridden planet? These questions suggest that there are other issues that must play out and be understood in the Great Controversy before Jesus can return. Is this why we have the book of Revelation and its end-time scenarios? Well, that's getting ahead of the story.

First, consider the 4000 years before Christ's first coming. During this time, believers found hope by cherishing the messages of the prophets of the coming Messiah. Also, the sacrificial system that God instituted held great promise. The sacrifices taught there was a plan for the forgiveness of sin through a redeemer represented by the sacrificial lamb.

Satan Prepared Israel to Reject the Messiah

The sacrifices were to teach God's principle of self-sacrificing love. However, Satan deceived the ancient nations to adopt sacrifices *to appease* the gods. Israel also adopted such pagan understandings. This fit Satan's idea of God as a tyrant unwilling to forgive, which led Israel to confusion, unbelief, idolatry, and rebellion.

God's purpose for Israel was to establish a blessed and holy people. Unfortunately, Israel couldn't grasp God's law of selfless love. So, God gave the Ten Commandments as a description of His law for sin damaged minds (Galatians 3:19). Satan led the religious leaders to see the law of

God as merely external. They conformed outwardly to the Ten Commandments while remaining selfish and hard of heart. They totally missed the principle of self-sacrificing love. It's selfless love that doesn't kill, steal, or replace God with idols.

Meanwhile, demons learned how to possess the minds, bodies, and voice boxes of men and women. Mankind had degenerated to a woeful condition. When it seemed that Satan was about to triumph, the Son of God came with an outpouring of divine love and grace (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, 36-37). Now Satan had to come out in the open before the eyes of the holy angels and watching universe to directly combat the Son of God in human flesh. Inspired by Satan, the religious leaders accused Jesus of trying to destroy the law of Moses. They lied about Him and plotted to kill Him.

The Amazing Revelation of The Cross

Jesus lived the heavenly principle of God's law showing His character of love, justice, and mercy in His life and through His sacrifice on the cross—truly self-sacrificing love! Satan also revealed his

character at the cross. He was the tyrant; he killed the Messiah. God was not unfair; He was not a tyrant. Furthermore, God could and would forgive. The proof was one human life fully obedient to the law, a righteous life offered in place of man's sinful life. And one sacrifice for the penalty of man's sin on a cross on Calvary!

All the universe could clearly see the truth. Colossians 2:15 says that Jesus "spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." *The Desire of the Ages* says that up until the death of Christ, "holy beings had not understood his [Satan's] principles" (*The Desire of Ages*, 758), but at the cross "his disguise was torn away" (*The Desire of Ages*, 761). He was seen to be a murderer. All ties of sympathy from the holy angels were broken completely.

Why Didn't the Great Controversy End After Calvary?

After Christ was resurrected, were all the issues revealed and settled? God was seen to be love and not an unfair tyrant. Clearly, forgiveness

was offered. God's justice had not destroyed His mercy. Christ had kept the law as a human being, showing it wasn't faulty or too severe. Man could receive His righteousness as a free gift. Could Satan and his evil hosts have been destroyed at that time with all the universe satisfied and peaceful once again? Why have 2000 years passed by since the cross?

God in His all-knowing wisdom knew that not all was yet understood about good and evil. He couldn't yet remove all sin with any assurance that it wouldn't recur. Even the holy angels couldn't see it all yet, and most of the human race didn't even understand what happened in the Christ event. *"For the sake of Man Satan's existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of Light and the prince of darkness"* (*The Desire of Ages*, 761).

Even though deceptions one and two had been proven false, ignorance makes humans vulnerable. Satan still deceives people to think of God as unfair and even punitive when difficult things happen, such as getting cancer, a loved one dying unexpectedly, or experiencing a

broken relationship. The teaching that God would burn people for eternity in hell is the most sadistic, evil form of the first deception. And all legalistic tendencies are based on the second deception. Thinking one has to somehow earn forgiveness and salvation is seeing God as reluctant to forgive.

God also knew that Satan would bring out another deception especially targeting those who have joyfully accepted God's forgiveness of sin and rejoice in His mercy and compassion. Satan was not about to let the believers in God's amazing grace get off easily. He concocted a diabolical plan for them, for you and me.

Let's first consider the early believers in Apostolic times. Soon after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the Holy Spirit came with power at Pentecost. The story of Jesus spread rapidly, and people's lives were changed. Transformation through the Holy Spirit became a major theme of the New Testament. Satan's power was breaking down. During this time, he came up with his third major deception. It wasn't a completely new idea, but with some refinement, it had the potential to work powerfully *on the believers*.

Satan reasoned that since Christ died to forgive sin, the law no longer needed to be kept. His conclusion? **Deception #3: God's forgiveness overrides or nullifies His law.** God's mercy was greater than His justice (*The Desire of Ages*, 762).

Of course, this is not true, because if the law didn't need to be kept, Christ didn't need to die to pay the penalty for man's transgression of the law. If there was no need for upholding justice, God could have forgiven man as an act of mercy without Christ's life and sacrifice. Besides, Christ as a human kept the law perfectly. This meant God obviously maintained the justice of the law in both the life and death of Jesus and showed perfect mercy at the same time. But confusion abounds today and stalls the completion of the Great Controversy. Consider the following clear statement:

It was because the law was changeless, because man could be saved only through obedience to its precepts, that Jesus was lifted up on the cross. Yet the very means by which Christ established the law Satan represented as destroying it. Here will come the last conflict of the great controversy

between Christ and Satan...It is the last great deception that he will bring upon the world (*The Desire of Ages*, 763).

What Is God's Answer to Deception #3?

If you know God's answer to Satan's third deception, you also know why God raised up the Seventh-day Adventist Church. What demonstrates that God's forgiveness has not superseded His law, that God's mercy has not destroyed His justice? The proof is the people who support God's law, and to whom God has empowered obedience. This proves that the law was not nullified; that there is no reason to think God's law is faulty, too hard to keep, or deficient in any way. God is love and His law is perfect love, both merciful and just.

Challenges Resolved by Jesus

Can people actually keep God's law? Didn't Jesus obey the law for us because we can't? If we take the free gift of Christ's righteousness but keep sinning, breaking the law, aren't we continuing under the power of Satan? If we must

remain lawbreakers, isn't Satan correct? The Ten Commandments would just be the ten suggestions; basically useless, null and void.

It is true that Jesus kept the law of God as a human being. His righteousness is a gift to us. The law was upheld. However, we need to take a closer look at the humanity of Jesus. He was "*that holy thing*" conceived in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). If Mary was His real mother, He received her DNA. Otherwise, He wasn't a real human like us. Her DNA was damaged by the effects of sin as is all human DNA. That didn't make Jesus a sinner, but it did mean he couldn't depend on His own human strength and wisdom to live His human life. He even explained this, saying, "*I can of my own self do nothing*" (John 5:30, see also John 5:19, John 8:28, Romans 8:3).

To live as a human in the place of man, Jesus could not use His divine power because no other human being has that possibility. Therefore, during His entire human life, Jesus had to depend 100% on divine power *outside of Himself* to work miracles and to overcome the temptations of Satan. As a damaged human being (not a sinner -

Hebrews 4:15), Jesus left an example for how we also can overcome. We must learn total dependence on divine power and nothing of ourselves (see 1 Peter 2:21-24, John 5:30, Romans 8:3-4). Jesus said that with faith, *“nothing shall be impossible unto you”* (Matthew 17:20).

This is where the Holy Spirit plays a major role. Jesus lived by the Holy Spirit from birth, but we have to have a rebirth. Jesus said, *“Except a man be born of the Water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (John 3:5). The key to total dependence on God is being born again of the Holy Spirit. This is the bridge to God and His power which enables obedience to heaven’s principle of selfless love including the Ten Commandments.

In the parable of the vine and the branches, Jesus’ point was that abiding in Him is how we depend 100% on the power of God. It’s the only way to have the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives, a living connection by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is the great principle of heaven. Without that living

connection with Jesus, we could never keep the law of God (John 15:1-8, Galatians 5:22-25).

It was impossible for the sinner to keep the law of God, which was holy, just, and good; but this impossibility was removed by the impartation of the righteousness of Christ to the repenting, believing soul...Therefore he [Satan] has originated the falsehood that the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary's cross was for the purpose of freeing men from the obligation of keeping the commandments of God.... Having suffered the full penalty for a guilty world, Jesus became the Mediator between God and man, to restore the repenting soul to favor with God by giving him grace to keep the law of the Most High (*Signs of the Times*, June 20, 1895).

How Will the Third Deception Play Out in The End?

According to Revelation 13 and 17, the third deception will occur with the mark of the beast, the harlot woman, and the ten horns who will make war with the Lamb. But God will empower

his followers to be completely faithful. These are the end-time “*saints*” of Revelation 14:12 “*who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.*”

The warfare against God’s law, which began in heaven, will be continued until the end of time. Every man will be tested. Obedience or disobedience is the question to be decided by the whole world. All will be called to choose between the law of God and the laws of men. Here the dividing line will be drawn. There will be but two classes. Every character will be fully developed; and all will show whether they have chosen the side of loyalty or that of rebellion. Then the end will come. God will vindicate His law and deliver His people (*Desire of Ages*, 763).

Each person will have a character fully developed—for evil or for good. God will guide the pressure of events to lead every person to go completely one way or the other. No middle ground will be possible, just as it wasn’t for the angels when war broke out in heaven.

Of course, since God loves us, He wants us all to be saved. The Almighty, infinite God will do everything we need to prepare us for this crisis. We have no power to preserve ourselves blameless for the coming of Jesus, but our faithful God has that power to do it in us.

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calls you, who will also do it (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

The Final Hour of Destiny

Seventh-day Adventist Christians have always believed in Christ's soon coming, and that some phase of the judgment comes to the world before Jesus returns. The first angel's message in Revelation 14:7 is a warning to those living near the end of history that "*the hour of His judgment IS COME*" (emphasis added). This pre-advent judgment provides insight regarding the eradication of evil and sin.

Seventh-day Adventist Christians believe that the Bible teaches the judgment started in 1844. It's evident in Daniel chapters 7-9. Millions of people have seen public presentations given from the Bible alone with some collaborating history and became convinced that we are living in the time of the pre-advent judgment.

What Is the Purpose of The Judgment Before Jesus Comes?

It is not safe to assume that all who say they have accepted Christ will be saved when Jesus comes again. First, people can change their minds. Second, people can profess Christ while living contrary to the way Christ wants them too. People often ignore the Holy Spirit in their daily decisions and listen to the enemy instead. One can think he is a follower of God when he really is not.

In Matthew 7:21 Jesus plainly said that professing the Lord doesn't determine who's going to end up in heaven. "Not everyone that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of

my Father which is in heaven.” It’s those who do the will of God that will find eternity in heaven. Actions speak louder than words. This is why a judgment is needed before Jesus comes.

Actions show that words professing Christ are true, that they not only are forgiven through Christ’s shed blood, but that Christ has changed them. They are converted, “*new creatures*” in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). In other words, they really have an empowered relationship with Jesus, not the mere talk of a relationship. “*He that has the Son has life*” (1 John 5:12). He knows and obeys God. The judgment will reveal this.

Keeping God’s commandments shows we know God. “*And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments*” (1 John 2:3). Verse 4 says if we profess to know Christ but disobey His commandments, we are liars. 1 John 5:3 says, “*this is the love of God that we keep His commandments.*” Keeping the commandments is not a means of earning heaven, but rather a love response to God with whom one has a deep abiding relationship. Love is not legalism. Selfless love is the principle of

heaven. Jesus said, *“If you love me, keep my commandments”* (John 14:15).

The ability to keep the commandments only comes from God in that deep abiding relationship, 100% dependence on divine power outside of self. It’s the action of a changed heart and life that will be the issue in the judgment. That’s why James 2:12 says we *“shall be judged by the law.”*

The Battle Over the Law of God

People that argue against God’s law, willfully refusing obedience, show lack of understanding at best or rebellion at worst. The devil has construed false theories to keep people confused, to think they don’t need to obey God’s commandments—at least not all of them. Satan likes to pit love, grace, and mercy against the Ten Commandments. He only has to get people to refuse one of the Ten Commandments. As James 2:10 says, *“Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point he is guilty of all.”*

Breaking any commandment will do, but which commandment is the focal point of Satan’s attack in the last days? It’s the fourth, the

Sabbath commandment, the one that points to God as creator, the Lord of all. This is not surprising. The devil labored to get the day changed in the practice of the Christian world, yet the Bible is clear regarding the Sabbath.

The Final Hour of Destiny Begins

The Bible says that judgment comes sometime after a man dies (Hebrews 9:27). But what about the people alive at the return of Christ? As the pre-advent, investigative judgment draws to a close, judgment will focus on the people alive, those still making choices. The judgment of the living is quite an amazing thought. It's not so hard for God and angels to judge those who have died because their record is final. All records are perfect and won't change because dead people no longer make choices. But how can living people who are still making choices be judged?

This is where the "mark of the beast" joins the picture. The devil is working to get Christians to make a stand against the law of God even while they claim to honor God. God is raising up voices to proclaim the love of Jesus and His law together. They are to warn people because God

wants to save them, which is a very specific reason that our church exists. This important message must be shared, or people will be deceived into rebellion against God. Each one will ultimately show by their actions the loyalty of his or her heart. This is the judgment of the living.

A Unique Challenge for God

What is the challenge? Those who have died have obviously stopped sinning, and if they had been repentant and confessed their sins, they would have been forgiven. Their life records are final and show if they were born again and growing in Christ or not. But to judge people yet living, who can change their minds, presents a special difficulty for God. Let's summarize God's position.

1. As our High Priestly Mediator, He is our sin bearer. He carries us in His heart. He loves us and doesn't want anyone to be lost.
2. In a very real sense, God's integrity is at stake with what He does with the living in the end times. The devil has claimed that God and His law are faulty and

cannot be obeyed. From this perspective, Christ Himself is in judgment in His saints.

This is the reason for the apparent delay in Jesus' return in power and glory. Where are those faithful followers of God that are keeping His law?

Illustration Of God's Problem

Imagine Satan talking with his demonic angels. He says, "We lost in heaven, we lost at Calvary, but we can win in the judgment of the living just before Christ is to return."

The other evil angels ask, "What can we do to win?"

Satan answers, "Put great pressure on all Christians to keep them breaking God's commandments for which we were cast out of heaven. Then, in the judgment of the living, if Christ designates just one person for translation to heaven who is not repentant as well as obedient, He must take all of us back to heaven, too."

The Exoneration of God

Do you see God's problem? Christ must have commandment-keeping people ready for the judgment of the living before He will come again to raise the dead and bind up Satan. The issue isn't so much about what people can do, but rather what God can do for helpless sinners to empower them to live out His commandments. Isaiah 5:16 shows the most important issue in the judgment is what people will be able to see in God as the justifier and sanctifier of a lost race. *"But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness."* It's God's name, character, and actions that are exalted, sanctified, vindicated, or exonerated in the judgment before the whole universe.

Satan's "life insurance policy" is to keep Christians breaking the commandments ignorantly or willfully. Revelation 12:17 says, *"The dragon was wroth with the woman and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus."* Satan is warring against

God's remnant who God is bringing to the full faith of Jesus and commandment keeping (Rev. 14:12). When God has them ready, Jesus will come.¹³

The Close of Probation

Before Jesus comes, the judgment of the living will cease. "Every case has been decided for life or death. Christ has made atonement for His people and blotted out their sins.... Then Jesus ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above.... When He leaves the sanctuary...the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor" (*The Great Controversy*, 613-614). This does not mean that they now have to overcome on their own. It would be impossible to be faithfully obedient to God without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they must remain totally dependent on divine power. They are willing to be nothing so that God can be everything.

¹³ This illustration comes from *Ohio Witness*, an unpublished outreach training manual by Dan O'Ffill.

Living without an intercessor simply means that Christ's ministry for forgiveness of sin is over. Every case is already decided. The preparation through daily surrender and 100% dependance on Christ and the Holy Spirit became their constant way of life. In Christ they stand. There is no other way.

And God has shown what He can do for His people. He proves that the law is not nullified or abrogated. God exonerates His character and law. He has transformed and sanctified His people, and they are faithful to the law of heaven, the great principle of self-sacrificing love. Their faithfulness to the Sabbath commandment in the face of death is the tangible factor showing their loyalty to the Creator God. They are the 144,000 "who have stood without an intercessor" and "are without fault before the throne of God" (*The Great Controversy*, 649 and Revelation 14:5).

The Purpose of God's Exoneration

God is cleared from all of Satan's charges by His love and faithfulness throughout the entire Great Controversy. He was vindicated by the

amazing life and atoning death of Christ proving that He was not an unjust tyrant, showing it is His glory to forgive our sins. And He is exonerated in the final events of history, including what He achieves with the last generation of believers, His 144,000. Notice the song of the redeemed as they praise God on the sea of glass: *“Great and marvelous are thy works. Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest”* (Revelation 15:3-4). God exonerates Himself through His righteous judgments. *“The Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness”* (Isaiah 5:16).

In the Great Controversy God is allowing all His actions to be revealed to everyone. And in the final events of Revelation 13-18, God is allowing Satan his chance to fully demonstrate his principles. In contrast to Satan’s rule of chaos, force, persecution, and murder, God’s principles will be manifested in how he holds up that “last generation.” In the face of the greatest adversity,

they will live fully by His great principles of truth. This will prove that the law is not nullified and vindicate the character of God. This is God's plan, not man's plan.

God promises that when He ends the Great Controversy and eradicates sin from the earth, evil will never raise its ugly head again. *"What do you imagine against the Lord? He will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time"* (Nahum 1:9). Only an infinite, all-knowing, all-powerful God could make such a promise. The whole Great Controversy settles every question and accusation that has been made against the character of God so thoroughly that God guarantees that even with freedom of choice nobody in the universe will ever choose sin again. Everyone will say "never again."

Philippians 2:10-11 says that the day is coming "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in the heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." This means the wicked as well as the righteous will acknowledge God's fairness and goodness, that He is God, and

He alone deserves our worship and allegiance. Even Satan and the evil angels are included. How could this be? This will happen after the New Jerusalem comes down on the earth after the 1000 years (Revelation 20). However, the wicked are not repentant when they acknowledge God's goodness. They are about to attack the New Jerusalem, but are stopped by God's panoramic view in the sky. God shows them the key scenes in the Great Controversy. And each one sees a replay of his or her life. They see all the ways that God intervened in their lives, and how they resisted and refused Him. His love, His fairness, His mercy, and His justice are so overwhelming that each one falls upon his or her knees in an amazing confession of truth.

After God withdraws the panoramic view, the effect wears off, and they proceed to attack the New Jerusalem anyway. This reveals the incurable nature of rebellion. At that point, the devil and all the wicked can be destroyed, and all the beings of God's universe will understand and never choose sin again. Nahum 1:9 comes true, and the Lord is truly "*exalted in judgment*" and "*sanctified in righteousness*" as Isaiah 5:16 says.

This is the purpose of the vindication of God's character before the whole universe. Freedom of choice will be preserved and the universe made safe for eternity!

Why Isn't the Great Controversy Finished?

What is God waiting for? "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own" (Ellen White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 69). The reproduction of God's character is living out His law of selfless love. God must have His 144,000.

What about the gospel commission of Matthew 28:18-20? The final crisis is coming, and we have a mission to share the everlasting gospel and to warn the world. People must have the opportunity to know truth that will help them make the right decisions as we approach the final hour of destiny (see Revelation 14:1-12). How many friends, neighbors, work associates, and relatives have been left without a chance to understand these matters?

How Can I Know I'm Ready for The Judgment of The Living?

Revelation tells us that we need to be counted among God's commandment keepers, including the fourth commandment (Revelation 12:17; 14:5, 12; 22:14). It's not legalistic obedience but loving obedience—selfless love is not legalism! However, the Pharisees of Jesus' day show us that it is possible to have outward conformity in keeping God's law and still be a mean, jealous, or selfish person. Paul wrote that we must examine ourselves to see if we are really in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). We must be certain that we have selfless love motivating doing right, the great principle of the law. We must know for certain that we are born again, converted, and have a real relationship with Jesus. We must know our Bible and the truth, be persons of prayer, and have a burden for the lost and make efforts for them.

How do we know that we've really been converted, that we truly are walking in the Spirit? Jesus said that if we are really connected to Him, there will be much fruit. That is, the fruit of the

Spirit will be in the life of the believer (John 15:1-8). Galatians 5:22-23 says, "*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering (patience), gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, (and) temperance.*" It is "*the object of the Christian life*" to live out these traits of character, to live out the fruit of the Spirit (*Christ Object Lessons*, 67). Jesus said that without Him we can't do it, but if we are connected to Him, *He* can produce the fruit in our lives (*The Desire of Ages*, 675-678).

But each must ask him or herself, Do I have the Fruit of the Spirit? Have I been born again? Am I walking with God? What if I do not have the fruit of patience with my spouse or my children? What if I get easily offended or irritated when someone crosses me or disagrees with me? Do I get bitter in my heart? "*If this is the spirit you have, bear in mind that you have not the spirit of Christ. It is another spirit*" (Ellen White, *Review and Herald*, December 21, 1886).

All Are Called to Repentance

Jesus said, "*Except you repent, you will all likewise perish*" (Luke 13:3). Repentance is not optional. Peter wrote that God is "*not willing that*

any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The Scriptures show repeatedly that “The Lord bears long with the waywardness of men, and to all He grants opportunity to see and forsake their sins” (Patriarchs and Prophets, 626). Jesus adds that “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

The Object of Repentance

Repentance is needed for receiving forgiveness of sin. Repentance fully understood includes dying to self and sin, making a full surrender to Jesus. Dying to self is essential to being born again. After all, how can one be born again when still living in the old life? The new birth gives us the vital connection with Jesus that grows the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit tells us that our connection with Jesus is real and will get us through the final crisis, the judgment of the living, our final hour of destiny. Everything depends on being connected to Jesus, moment by moment. *“He that has the Son has life” (1 John 5:12).* Jesus has shown that His love for you is stronger than death. You can trust Him with your

whole life. He can be everything when you are willing to be nothing!