

GOD INTERVENES IN THE REBELLION

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At the lowest point in human depravity God chose to intervene in person in the conflict between Christ and Satan. Jesus became the God-man, born as a babe in Bethlehem and growing to maturity in Palestine. Day by day the two protagonists met in hand-to-hand combat, Satan plying all his devilish skill to try to force Jesus into submission to the universal law of sin.

The world at the beginning of the Christian era was even more depraved than is our society today. Roman restaurants offered something never seen in their modern counterparts: a vomitorium for the convenience of jaded clientele who lived only to eat. And violent as our modern amusements are, we don't flock to the stadiums to watch human beings fight each other or animals to a bloody death. Gladiators drew crowds who came expressly to watch them die in agony. Ancient Rome, with its huge slave population and depressing preoccupation with degradation and suicide, was the nadir of human morality.

It was at this lowest point in human depravity, when Satan's challenge seemed on the verge of success, that God chose to intervene in person. One doesn't actually need to read the Bible in order to recognize that an ongoing battle is raging between Christ and Satan. Two absolute, universal realities are evidence enough—the reality of death

and the reality of sin, coupled with our divinely implanted longing for deliverance from both.

If death attacked only imbeciles or criminals, we might see some value in it. But it also sweeps away our Beethovens and Lincolns. These twin certainties—our universal mortality and depravity—have been the despair of human history from the beginning.

By the time God chose to intervene personally, the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan had assumed dimensions far beyond a rebellion by dissatisfied angels. It had become the greatest lawsuit of eternity. The litigants were locked in a struggle wherein only one could win and only one would survive; both would be mortally wounded. Planet Earth, as the seat of Satan's activity, had to be the venue for the trial. The spectators, the universe of God, would serve as jury.

Satan was suing God, if you will, on accusations of monstrous divine fraud. God had deceived all the inhabitants of earth and heaven, he charged; the issue was the supposed injustice of the divine law. "Satan represents God's law of love as a law of selfishness. He declares it impossible for us to obey its precepts. The fall of our first parents he charges upon the Creator, leading men to look upon God as the author of sin, suffering, and death."—E. G. White, *From Heaven with Love*, p. 14.

The absolute universality of sin and death appeared to prove that Satan was right. Without exception, "all have sinned." Romans 3:23. To this day, Satan's charge that God's law makes unrealistic, impossible demands is almost

universally believed. Lust, greed, and cruel selfishness are universally regarded as inevitable and virtually justified simply because men and women are “only human.”

The tragic unfolding of crime, immorality, political intrigue, business corruption, and terrorism too pointedly illustrate the issues in the great cosmic conflict.

How could God solve the problem? More divine fiats? More law? More thunder-and-lightning demands that mankind shape up or else? These would only further fuel Satan’s accusations. And if Satan wins his point that God’s law is unjust and impossible, God and His government must go. He cannot rule by force as an autocratic dictator.

God accepted Satan’s challenge head-on. He Himself would become a man, fully human, and meet the enemy in open combat. He would intervene in person and prove Satan’s accusations to be false by becoming a human being and living in complete obedience to His own law.

The way He made His personal entry into the human arena shows God’s penchant for doing things in a quiet, unobtrusive way. “When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” Galatians 4:4. By the Holy Spirit, an obscure virgin conceived a child and gave birth in the humblest refuge the planet afforded—a stable for cows, chickens, and goats in the little village of Bethlehem. The great ones of earth paid no attention to the event.

In fact, the ancient world was stunned when the apostles’ gospel broke the news: God had humbled Himself to come in search of lost man to restore him from rebellion to loyalty. Here was an undreamed-of heavenly love that overthrew all the value systems of antiquity.

Christ’s divinity did not in the least dilute His full humanity. His name was to be “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” Matthew 1:23. So complete was His identity “with us” that He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15.

The trial was on. Day by day the two protagonists met in hand-to-hand combat, Satan plying all his devilish skill to try to force Jesus into submission to the universal reality of sin. If he should succeed in enticing Christ to yield to temptation only once, he would win his case at the bar of the universe. But if Jesus should succeed in saying No to every temptation all the way through to the tortuous end, He would win the case.

Christ’s mission was to prove Satan wrong on every count of his devilish accusations against God. He must prove that men and women, connected with Heaven through faith, do not need to sin. He must prove that sin is not necessary, not valid. Satan had invented sin, he held it up as a challenge to God, as something that even He could not conquer. But the Son of God must “condemn sin” by demonstrating that Satan’s charge was false.

If Jesus were to have in the contest any advantage that we cannot also have, or if He were to be in any way shielded from the full force of temptation as we

know it, Satan would have shouted Foul! to highest heaven. Jesus must have no resource not available to us by faith.

According to Scripture, God's personal intervention in the great conflict was carried out in full view of the unfallen universe. Sinless angels and other beings understood the legal drama as it unfolded scene by scene. From His infancy in the rude stable, through childhood conflicts, through early youth and young manhood through the terrible strain of His ministry, Jesus constantly faced and withstood the fiercest temptations Satan could blast at Him.

The issue remained in doubt right up until the final scene. On the cross Jesus endured the most severe soul-wrenching trial any human has ever known—not just excruciating physical suffering, but the torture of sin and the feeling of being abandoned by His Father. Though sinless, in His humanity Jesus died the death of a sinner. But by faith, He shouted triumphantly, "It is finished!" The job was done; He had won His case, proved Satan wrong, and had delivered the human race from its slavery to sin.

Scripture describes the fateful scene in the familiar terminology of a court case: "Then I heard a voice in heaven proclaiming aloud: 'This is the hour of victory for our God, the hour of his sovereignty and power, when his Christ comes to his rightful rule! For the accuser of our brothers is overthrown, who day and night accused them before our God. By the sacrifice of the Lamb they have conquered him.'" Revelation 12:10, 11, NEB.

Satan was smart enough to know that the verdict had gone against him, yet he remained rebellious. "Woe to you, earth and sea, for the Devil has come down to you in great fury, knowing that his time is short!" Verse 12, NEB.

In crucifying the sinless Son of God, Satan had overreached himself. His evil nature got the best of him so that he exposed his true character before earth and heaven. Christ's victory over sin had proved the rebel to be "a liar, and the father of it." Now, by instigating the murder of the Son of God as well, he proved himself to be "a murderer from the beginning," for "there is no truth in him." John 8:44.

The New Testament revels in the glorious victory won. The Gladiator who slew the dragon in the arena was "Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. . . . He is not ashamed to call them brethren. . . . Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Hebrews 2:9-15.

"God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe, subject to the weakness of humanity, to meet life's peril in common with every soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it—at the risk of failure and eternal loss."—E. G. White, *From Heaven with Love*, p. 28.

At the time, the world paid little attention to the great battle being fought. But Christ earned the right to become the successful, fully capable Saviour of every human being who will welcome His personal intervention: "In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto his brethren. . . . For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted." Hebrews 2:17, 18.

Thus His total victory vanquished both sin and death. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 8:3, 4.

The way to conquer death was to conquer the cause of it—sin.

This was no legendary battle fought on a distant field far from our personal sympathies. The struggle took place in our human flesh; we are the arena! Here is where the victory was won; here is where sin was "condemned," proved not necessary, proved not valid. Victory is not a million miles away; it is as close as a hair's breadth, and it becomes ours by faith.

A corrosive 'fear of death' haunts each of us from birth. But this human fear, common to us all, is overcome by faith in Him who has "tasted death for every man," that is, tasted our feelings of despair. By faith we are "in Him," corporately involved in His tremendous victory. The enemy is henceforth a defeated foe. Christ undid all the ill that Adam unleashed upon us. "As by the offence of one [the

fallen Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [Christ, who wrestled Satan to death] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Romans 5:18.

The point is that Christ's victory of a sinless life and a sacrificial death purchased life and salvation for "all men." "All men" live because of His successful sacrifice. There is a literal sense in which the world has been saved by Him. If He had not intervened "when the fullness of the time was come" in the days of the Roman Empire, the human race would have committed a corporate suicide.

By His sacrifice Christ has "abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." 2 Timothy 1:10. For "all men" He has brought "life," whether or not they appreciate the gift. But for those who do believe and appreciate it, He has also brought immortality. For all, "He hath abolished death," the "second death," the ultimate "wages of sin." Revelation 20:14, Romans 6:23. Not one soul need ever perish in that final lake of fire which is "prepared for the devil and his angels." Matthew 25:41. That fire was never intended for humans.

The price of all human sin was paid on the cross. The only reason anyone can end up in that tragic place of fire is that he has resisted, rejected, and despised the "life and immortality" that Christ has already given him. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the

condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.” John 3:18, 19.

What a tragic, unnecessary fate the lost will choose! This is the “mystery of iniquity,” the mystery of the human choice to not believe, to elect darkness rather than light.

Nearly 2,000 years have rolled by since God intervened in human form to overthrow Satan in the human arena. The New Testament gospel boldly declares that ever since, “all men” owe to Him every blessing they enjoy. The apostle says that “one [Christ] died for all.” That is the same as saying that if He had not died for all, all would be dead. See 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15. Yet it seems that very few of His beneficiaries are willing to say Thank You. The percentage of those who make any acknowledgement of His sacrifice is shrinking; we live in what is openly said to be a post-Christian age. Was His magnificent victory in vain? Will Satan take over the planet by default? The same Scriptures that predicted the coming of the Deliverer predicted the ultimate success of His mission: “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.” Isaiah 53:11. The apostle John heard “voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” Revelation 11:15. According to the Bible, the human race today is standing on the verge of the final scenes of this unfolding divine drama.

God will not force a solution to the sin problem on us. He is the complete antithesis of a dictator who

stuffs the ballot boxes in contrived elections. Unless the people freely recognize and confess the rightness of His sovereignty, God will not force His rule upon them.

So God’s patience must allow Satan time to unmask himself before humanity as he did before the universe 2,000 years ago. The human race must see what Heaven has already seen—the utter depravity of the great rebel’s character, and how utterly unnecessary is submission to his cruel reign.

The prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation chronicle the steady unfolding of that disclosure through all the centuries since Christ. Already, millions of thoughtful people all over the world have recognized the issues involved in this war behind all wars and heartily long for the time when Immanuel shall “reign for ever and ever.” The personal issue must yet confront every human being: whom shall we acknowledge as Sovereign of our souls—Christ or Satan?

The good news that exposes the fallacy of Satan’s false accusations against God is steadily penetrating the consciousness of humanity everywhere. Christ predicted that “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Matthew 24:14. John saw “the everlasting gospel” being heralded “to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” Revelation 14:6. True, not all will accept but all will be brought to a decision for or against.

Scripture predicts a final Armageddon conflict that will resolve for all eternity the issues of the

controversy between Christ and Satan. The final battle in this great war is called Armageddon. See Revelation 16:13-18. Those who believe the good news will loyally line up on Christ's side. They that are with him are "called, and chosen, and faithful." Revelation 17:14. Those who join in rebellion to the bitter end will also be constrained to confess the justice of His victory. "Every creature . . . heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Revelation 5:13.

Neither fear of punishment nor hope of reward will extort such a confession from the hearts of the wicked; conscience alone can force it from their souls. The final clarification of the issues in the great controversy will require "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in 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." Philippians 2:

Two harvests will ripen side by side—"the harvest of the earth," the good grain, those who are loyal to Christ; and "the clusters of the vine of the earth," the grapes fully ripe for destruction. "And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God." Revelation 14:14-19. Those who believe the good news will beautifully reflect the image of the character of Christ—those who persist in rebellion will at last bear the unmistakable stamp of Satan's character. Then the end can come.

The glorious victory won at the cross will at last be realized at the second coming of Christ.

The good news is that the time is near, so near that millions of Jesus' thoughtful followers around the world believe it will be in our generation. Scripture does not predict a fearful nuclear war that will wipe out civilization, but it does predict a final Armageddon conflict that will resolve for all eternity the issues of the controversy between Christ and Satan. This is the war behind all wars, the issue behind all issues that looms in overwhelming significance behind the scenes.

This is no time for fear and mourning. While unbelieving "men's hearts [are] failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth," it's time for God's people to "look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Luke 21:26-28.

What Really Happened On the Cross?

We often dwell on the excruciating pain of crucifixion, but this was a relatively minor part of what Jesus suffered. On the cross, He died the death sinners will die—the second death, eternal, irrevocable, and without hope. "In yielding up His precious life, Christ was not upheld by triumphant joy. All was oppressive gloom. It was not the dread of death that weighed upon Him. It was not the pain and ignominy of the cross that caused His inexpressible agony. . . . His suffering was from a sense of the malignity of sin.

"The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. . . . All His life Christ has been publishing to a fallen world the good news of

the Father's mercy and pardoning love. . . . But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face.

“Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that . . . broke the heart of the Son of God.” —E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 752, 753.