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● CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

# Proclamation!

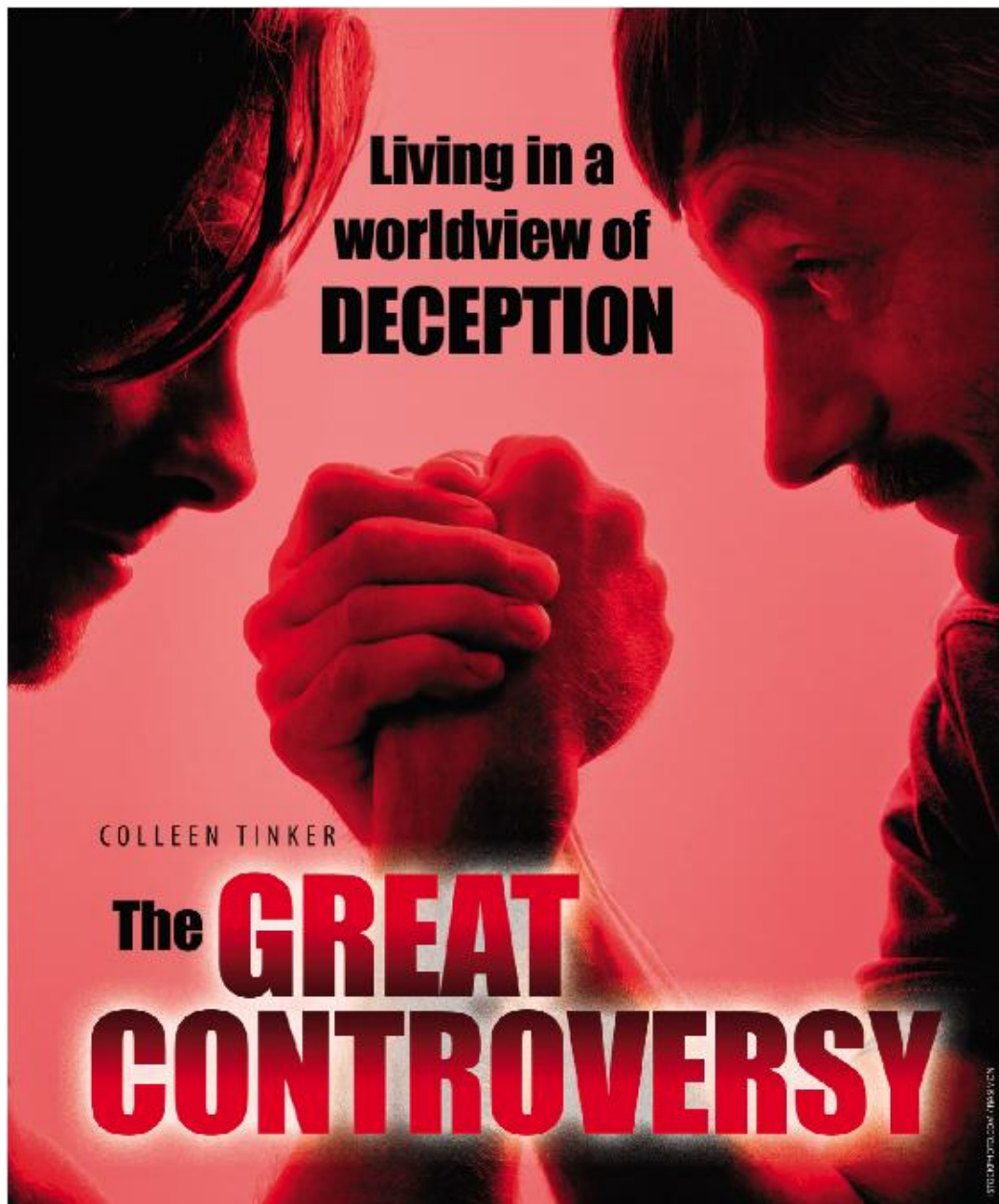
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Cover F E A T U R E

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In this postmodern age, Adventist leaders and authors are finding the great controversy to be an effective way to share Adventism with people who don't believe in "absolute truth".



It was a Sabbath in May, 1997. For the last time Richard and I left the room where we had co-led a Sabbath School class for the past several years. We had been studying Scripture systematically for three years, and the pillars of Adventism had been crumbling. We were done.

As we drove home Richard said, "At least there's one thing we will take with us: the great controversy worldview. It explains everything."

A year later we realized with a deep sense of horror that even our worldview was incompatible with the gospel. We had to renounce it.

## What is the "great controversy"?

Ellen G. White (EGW) had her famous two-hour "great controversy vision" in Lovett's Grove, Ohio, in mid-March, 1858. This vision is described in her book *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, and it describes Adventist reality like this:



Download a PDF file of the great controversy worldview compared to the Christian worldview.

- Before time began, God the Father exalted Jesus to be equal to Himself.
- When Adam and Eve sinned, the Father took Jesus into His inner council and allowed Him to become the sacrifice for sin.
- God's exaltation of Jesus over Lucifer made Lucifer jealous.
- Lucifer rebelled and turned one-third of heaven's angels against God.
- He accused God of unfairness, of giving a law too difficult to keep, yet demanding obedience.
- God banished Lucifer/Satan and his angels to earth.
- Satan deceived Eve, thus causing humanity to sin.1
- Ever since, Satan and Jesus have been battling each other for the souls of men.
- God gave the written transcript of His character on Mt. Sinai so we would know how to live.
- Jesus came with sinful flesh like Mary's to show us we can keep the law as He did.
- Jesus' death vindicates and exalts God's law.
- Ultimately God's people will become free of sin and prove God's law is fair and attainable.
- When God's people perfectly reproduce the character of Christ, they will vindicate God's character, prove Satan to be a liar, and thus help Jesus win the conflict with Satan.2
- Jesus will place all confessed sins on Satan who will carry them into the lake of fire where he, Satan, "will bear the final penalty" for them.3
- Finally, God's people have the power to "hasten [their] Lord's return" by throwing themselves into carrying the Adventist message to the world and keeping the law perfectly.4
- The mark demarcating the saved from the lost is the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, while worshiping on Sunday is the mark of the beast.5

When the early Adventists accepted the Lovett's Grove vision as truth, they cemented their position outside the Christian faith, interpreting Scripture through the lens of this new revelation. The investigative judgment had already gutted Jesus' completed atonement, and from 1858 on, Adventists had a complete story in which to frame their view of reality. They would use the same words and the same Bible all Christians use, but they would mean different things than Christians mean when discussing the Scriptures.

Today, nothing has changed. Their Fundamental Belief #8 says,

**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. ...[Satan] 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.**6

## Adventists affirm the centrality of great controversy theme

In this postmodern age, Adventist leaders and authors are finding the great controversy to be an effective way to share Adventism with people who don't believe in "absolute truth".

In the November, 2008 issue of *Ministry* magazine, Erman Norman addressed evangelizing a postmodern culture with the great controversy story. In his article entitled "Reaching the Secular World", Norman refers to an article entitled "Reaching Postmodern Society" which was published in the September, 2006 edition of the *Mid-America Outlook* and was written by *Outlook* editor Martin Weber. Norman wrote:

**We do hold, however, a very important key—the great controversy. This God-given narrative...which entails the story of Eden lost to Eden restored in the earth made new, synchronizes well every Adventist belief, characterizing it as uniquely Adventist in both content and scope....[and answers] many of the questions of the postmodern mind (Christ and His high priestly ministry, heaven and hell, the Sabbath, the state of the dead, etc.).**7

Norm Gulley makes an even more far-reaching statement. In his article "The Cosmic Controversy" published in the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Autumn, 1996, Gulley states, "Theology needs to break beyond the man-centered world view about human salvation to the cosmic world view about the great controversy. Seventh-day Adventists have an opportunity to lead out in this Einsteinian-like breakthrough into the broader world view."<sup>8</sup>

Gulley develops the idea that not only humans but inhabitants on other planets must vote to vindicate either God's fairness or Satan's accusations. He says,

**It is necessary that the truth about God, Christ and Satan be made manifest. The real story of all three is involved in the cosmic controversy. The revelation of who they really are must be made so that all created beings, angelic (fallen and unfallen), humans (redeemed and lost) and the unfallen inhabitants of worlds afar, may all vote unanimously on who is right and who is wrong. Only one side can win, yet all from both sides must vote, and vote the same. This is done with complete freedom, and is done purely on the evidence given by both sides.**9

When the early Adventists accepted the Lovett's Grove vision as truth, they cemented their position outside the Christian faith, interpreting Scripture through the lens of this new revelation.

Importantly, the idea of "unfallen inhabitants of worlds afar" is found in Ellen White's works, never in the Bible. Moreover, this assumption cannot stand the scrutiny of modern science.<sup>10</sup>

In 2010 Adventist publishing house Pacific Press released a new book compiled by Herbert E. Douglass entitled, *The Heartbeat of Adventism: The Great Controversy Theme in the Writings of Ellen G. White*. This book, organized into 21 sections plus an index, collects quotations from Ellen White's writings without Scriptural support and arranges them in themes. Many of the quotations in this article are cited from this book.

The following endorsement on the back cover of the book confirms that the great controversy theme shapes the Adventist worldview. Written by Fernando Canale, professor of theology at Andrews University Theological Seminary, these words summarize the Adventist worldview:

**Understanding...the great controversy theme will provide honest seekers with the indispensable big picture from which to frame their quest after truth. Many will find this work to be useful also as a tool to find the real God of Scripture hidden behind the maze of conflicting theological and ministerial traditions accumulated through the history of the Christian church.<sup>11</sup>**

Three more endorsements of Douglass's book emphasize the great controversy's necessity for Adventist doctrine, proselytizing, and infiltration into Christian theology. Jack Blanco, professor emeritus of Southern Adventist University and the author of the Adventist "expanded paraphrase" of the Bible, *The Clear Word*, says:

**An invaluable resource for...understanding of the great controversy theme that permeates our system of beliefs—from how we view God, sin, and salvation, to the cosmic issues that impact our future. It is a volume that ought to be in every school and personal library.<sup>12</sup>**

Jim Pedersen, president of the Northern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, says this:

**The great controversy theme is one of the special contributions of the Seventh-day Adventist movement, particularly as it is unfolded through the prophetic ministry and writings of Ellen G. White.<sup>13</sup>**

The former director of education for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Humberto M. Rasi, writes this:

**This metanarrative [the great controversy] provides a comprehensive framework that allows all the major themes of the Bible to fit into an integrated whole...The rapid growth of the Adventist Church around the world, the need to strengthen unity and mission focus among its members across different cultures...are all factors that in my view make this...book both compelling and timely.<sup>14</sup>**

## Why is this important?

Within the past few weeks Life Assurance Ministries had a booth at a national leadership conference for a well-known evangelical denomination. We passed out Proclamation! magazines and books to the pastors and other leaders there, and while many were eager to learn the truth about Adventism, several let us know they were convinced Adventism was not a serious problem.

That lack of concern is not surprising because Adventists say the "right words" about the Christian faith. Inside Adventism, in fact, members vary widely in what they claim to believe personally. Some say they don't believe in Ellen White; others say they don't have to keep the Sabbath to be saved, and many claim that salvation is by grace through faith alone. These words, however, mean something different to Adventists than they mean to Christians who hear them. For example, "salvation is by grace through faith alone" for an Adventist means God saves them by grace which includes giving them the faith in Christ's power to help them overcome sin and keep the law so they can help prove that God's law is fair, that God is a good God, that Satan is a liar, and that they themselves are safe to save.

In order to simplify this web of assumptions Adventists understand as "truth", I will discuss how the great controversy paradigm changes the truth about God, Jesus, man, and the gospel, and then I will summarize the implications of these changed identities and definitions.

## God and Satan: who is obligated to whom?

The cornerstone of the great controversy is its limitation of God—His sovereignty, responsibility, and identity. The Bible teaches that God is One (Deu. 6:4; Mk. 12:29-31; Jas. 2:19). He is all-powerful, sovereign, and has authority over everything, including Satan, who cannot make a move apart from God's sovereign permission (Job 1:12; 2:6), and who must flee when commanded by God's authority (Mt. 8:28-34).

Furthermore, God cursed the serpent in Eden, and from that earliest record of human history, God decreed Satan's defeat through Eve's seed (Gen. 3:15). There is not a hint that Satan has ever accused God of anything. Rather, Scripture identifies Satan as the "accuser of our brethren" (Rev. 12:10), but never of God. In fact, Satan and his demons know full well that they are subject to the One God and have no claim against Him. They know who God is—and they "shudder" because they are in rebellion against Him (Jas. 2:19).

Adventism, on the other hand, limits the power God can exercise over Satan and gives Satan illegitimate power. According to Adventism, God is obligated to protect Satan's "free will" as well as the free will of the supposed inhabitants of other planets and is obligated to prove that Satan's supposed accusations are unfair. In the great controversy, God limits His power so His creatures are free to accuse, question, and scrutinize His dealings and to pass judgment on His character. Furthermore, on the authority of EGW, Adventism teaches that God must allow Satan to inflict suffering, hardships, and death in order to convince humans and other worlds that he is evil:

**[A certain] woman had not been possessed in spirit, but the Lord had suffered Satan to exercise his will in bringing disease upon her; for God was demonstrating the character of his kingdom before the whole universe of heaven. This opportunity must be given him to reveal the character of apostasy. The inhabitants of worlds unfallen could view in this case the attributes of Satan and the character of God.<sup>15</sup>**

Scripture however, says this:

**For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you [Cyrus] by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. ...I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things...Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, "What are you making?"...I made the earth and created man on it...I have stirred him [Cyrus] up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward," says the LORD of hosts (Is. 45:4-13).**

Paul says the same things about God's position as sovereign over all creation in Romans 9:17-21. Quoting from the above Isaiah passage and also from Exodus 9:16 Paul says,

**For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."...**

**You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?**

Satan is not an independent agent of evil whose freewill God must protect. Evil is not an equal-but-opposite force opposing God's goodness. Rather, Satan is a fallen, sinful creation who is in rebellion toward His sovereign Creator. He has already been disarmed and humiliated at the cross of the Lord Jesus (Col. 2:15) (See figure on right).

Satan does oppose God's people, and he does inflict suffering, but Scripture tells us that this suffering comes only with God's permission and for His—not Satan's—purposes (Job 1:12; 2:6; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 12:7). God is not on trial, and Satan has already been judged (Jn. 12:31; 16:8-11).

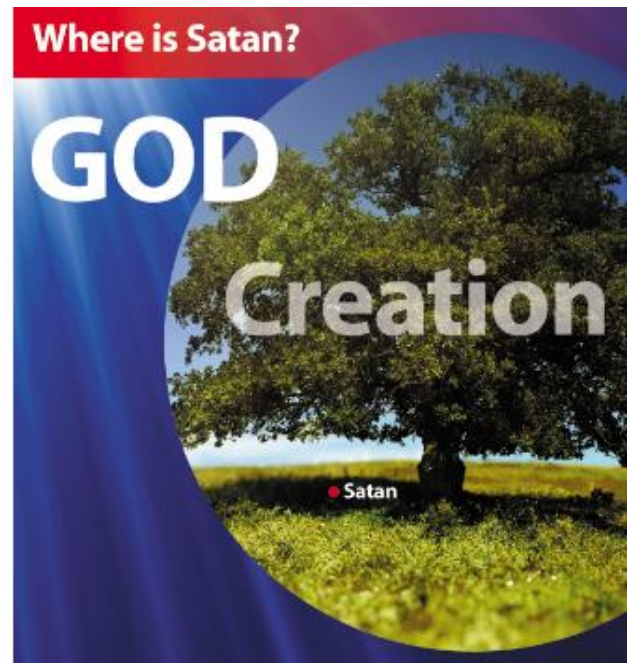
At the heart of the great controversy worldview is a god who must allow Satan to torment humans so they will see that the non-defensive, permissive god who loves his enemies is preferable to the assertive, deceptive Satan. Mankind is expected to see that God's kingdom is kinder and gentler than Satan's and thus choose to be on His side. EGW says this:

**And 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. He must choose whom he will serve.<sup>16</sup>**

In a nutshell, the great controversy offers salvation on the basis of the knowledge of good and evil—the echo of the original temptation that plunged us into spiritual death.

Scripture, however, says God sent His Son to save us (Jn. 3:16-17) so that He could rescue us from the domain of darkness and transfer us to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13). We are born dead in sin and objects of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3), by nature citizens of the domain of darkness. We have no choice about our natural citizenship. Jesus even said those who do not believe in the name of God's only begotten Son are "condemned already" (Jn. 3:18).

When Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, Israelites were not being given a choice between



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Satan's kingdom and God's. They were already bitten by deadly poison, and God gave them one provision: the bronze serpent. By simply believing God's command and looking they could be saved. Jesus revealed that He was the fulfillment of the bronze serpent's foreshadowing; all who believed in Him when He was lifted up would have eternal life in Him (Jn. 3:14-15).

Satan has not accused God of unfairness, nor must God prove He is superior to Satan. There is no question in the universe about God's sovereignty. All creation is subject to Him and answers to Him—even Satan.

### **The "transcript of God's character"**

The great controversy not only limits God's sovereign authority and power over all suffering and evil, but it also diminishes His character into something that can be summarized in the law. Ellen White said,

**"The law of God is a transcript of his character. The rebel leader was in opposition to the law of God, and revealed the fact that his principles were those that actuated one who is lawless, disobedient, unholy, an accuser, a liar, and a murderer."<sup>17</sup>**

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines "transcript" thus: "A: a written, printed, or typed copy: a usually typed copy of dictated or recorded material; B: an official or legal and often published copy: an official copy of a student's educational record."

A transcript is an exact duplication or replica. It contains all the information found in the original document or experience. The law (and when Ellen White uses the term "law" she usually refers to the Ten Commandments) cannot contain all the information of God's character nor was it intended to do so. Even if we look at the full Torah with the detailed applications of the law included throughout the Books of Moses, the fullness of God's mercy, grace, love, and provision is not and cannot be fully captured.

The only time God's character was fully revealed to humanity in material form was when the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, became incarnate in a mortal body and lived among men. Only in Jesus do we find a "transcript" of God's character (Heb. 1:1-3).

The choice of the word "transcript" is subtly deceptive. Christians may say that the law was a "revelation of God's character"—and that would be true. Every word God has spoken reveals Himself to mankind, but a revelation is not the same thing as a transcript. The revelation of God on Mt. Sinai in fire, thunder, and earthquakes was only a partial glimpse of God's holiness, a clear sign that men could not approach Him on their own terms without a mediator. The Sinai revelation of God's holiness, however, was completely different from His revelation of Himself to Elijah at the same mountain in a still, small voice. "Revelations" God gives of Himself are only partial glimpses into His eternal, unfathomable greatness.

Adventism, under the authority of EGW who is their "continuing and authoritative source of truth",<sup>18</sup> deceptively establishes the great controversy worldview by equating the law with the character of God rather than acknowledging it is a revelation of Him. This subtle assumption shifts the identity of God, the purpose of Christ's ministry, and man's duty.

Ellen White narrowed the focus of Satan's rebellion in heaven and of the great controversy itself to the law:

**The law of God was the great subject of controversy in heaven. It is the great subject of controversy ever since the fall of Satan and will continue to be the great test question showing the loyal and the transgressors in two parties.<sup>19</sup>**

By equating the law with the character of God, the great controversy worldview makes law, not the Lord Jesus or the Triune God, the object of humans' and angels' loyalty or rebellion. Adventists believe that the law is the highest authority in the universe and is the necessary factor in avoiding sin and in perfecting their characters. EGW said,

**In God's moral government, which is a government based upon a distinction between right and wrong, law is essential to secure right action. God's law is the expression of His character....to require less from His creatures than obedience to His law would be to abandon them to ruin. To fail to punish transgression of His law would be to place the universe in confusion. The moral law is God's barrier between the human agent and sin.<sup>20</sup>**

Yet it is God Himself, not the law, that is the One we must serve. Adventists, because of EGW's claims, say that Adam and Eve's sin was the transgression of God's law. To be sure, they disobeyed God's clear command to them—but it was God against whom they transgressed, not the law.

When Nathan confronted David about his sin against Bathsheba and his arranged murder of her husband Uriah, David responded in Psalm 51 with these words, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment" (Ps. 51:4).

Like David, Adam and Eve sinned by not trusting and obeying God; their sins were not against the inanimate law but against God whom they knew. Scripture is clear, in fact, that the law did not exist until Sinai (Gal. 3:17; Rom. 4:13-14).

Moreover, Scripture states that the righteousness that we need is not perfect law-keeping. What we need—and what God has provided in Jesus—is "the righteousness of God" which is "apart from the law"

(Rom. 3:21). It is not "a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Phil. 3:9).

In other words, EGW is wrong; the law is not "God's barrier between the human agent and sin," nor is law "essential to secure right action." Jesus is the barrier between us and sin; He is the One essential for righteousness.

By making the law the "transcript of God's character", the great controversy puts it on a par with God. For example, EGW attributes to the law the regenerating power that only belongs to the Holy Spirit and claims it is the pledge of eternal life:

**God's law is given to men as a hedge, a shield....To the obedient it is the pledge of eternal life, for it expresses the principles that endure forever. Christ came to demonstrate the value of the divine principles by revealing their power for the regeneration of humanity. He came to teach how these principles are to be developed and applied.<sup>21</sup>**

Moreover, Adventists believe that Jesus died to turn sinners back to honoring the law. Law-keeping is equated with being right with God:

**The Majesty of heaven gave His life to make us individually His own by bringing back the transgressor to his loyalty to God's law, by turning away the sinner from his iniquity.<sup>22</sup>**

In the courtyard beside the Pioneer Memorial Church on the campus of Andrews University, the home of the Seventh-day Adventist theological seminary, a prayer garden depicts the great controversy view of reality. A plaque at the edge of the garden explains the garden's representation of how one experiences God. The excerpts below are taken from the legend on the plaque:

**Walking the garden's edge, searching for a way in, we see the podium, an overlook where one can see across the water, through the arbor, and imagine God the Father represented in the ten commandments....Ever narrowing, the winding path leads to the narrow gate with three crosses. Standing at the gate you are at the moment of decision to approach the foot of the cross. Between the gate and the cross is the Stair of Creation, one step for each day of creation. [Importantly, there are only six days of creation, not seven as found in this garden; God ceased from His work on the seventh.] The steps widen and were made a perfect number that it might seem easy to approach the cross. For once the decision is made for Christ, it is not so difficult....Standing at the foot of the Cross you imagine Christ...and looking up...you read the promise, "I Will Come Again".... The Commandments beckon from across [the garden on the opposite wall]. It seems a long walk, like leaving earth, and entering the universe of the Creator. The path from the Cross leads directly to the Commandments... The Commandments stand at the center of the circle. Once within the circle, up close and intimate, we read what the hand of God wrote in millenniums past. Simple and embraced by the Father's arms, intimate in His presence.**

The Bible is clear: the cross does not lead us to the commandments; Jesus' death did not lift "the law of God to its own eternal dignity". Paul said, "...by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets" (Rom. 3:20-21). And in Galatians 3:19 he explained, "Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made." The law came in with Moses and lasted until Christ (Gal 3:19; Rom. 7:1-7).

Finally, Jesus stated that it is being born again, not loyalty to the law, that marks those who are fit for heaven. He told Nicodemus in John 3:3, 6, 14-15: "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God; unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life."

It is God the Son, not the law, who is the "transcript" of God's character, and He, not the law, is the focus and source and definition of God's righteousness and our only means of salvation.

## Who is Jesus?

The great controversy hangs on EGW's statements that God the Father exalted Jesus to be His equal. This exaltation made Lucifer jealous and reveals that Lucifer had some reasons to believe God could have picked him for this exaltation, but didn't. Here are some of EGW's statements:

**Satan's position in heaven had been next to the Son of God. He was first among the angels.<sup>23</sup>**

**Satan was once an honored angel in heaven, next to Christ. His countenance, like those of the other angels, was mild and expressive of happiness. His forehead was high and broad, showing great intelligence. His form was perfect; his bearing noble and majestic.<sup>24</sup>**

**The exaltation of the Son of God as equal with the Father was represented as an injustice to Lucifer, who, it was claimed, was also entitled to reverence and honor.<sup>25</sup>**

**paradigm, Jesus was not the eternal, almighty God. Instead, God exalted him to be His equal at some time in the distant past.**

When Adam and Eve sinned, this exalted Jesus begged the Father to allow Him to come to earth to die for them. The Father finally acquiesced, and

**The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind.<sup>26</sup>**

In the great controversy paradigm, Jesus was not the eternal, almighty God. Instead, God exalted him to be His equal at some time in the distant past. When Jesus came to the earth, He "volunteered to take humanity" so that "in His power, humanity can obey God".<sup>27</sup> Thus, He came in the fallen condition of sinful man. EGW says,

**By taking upon Himself man's nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin.<sup>28</sup>**

**Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation.<sup>29</sup>**

**Christ bore the sins and infirmities of the race as they existed when He came to the earth to help man. In behalf of the race, with the weaknesses of fallen man upon Him, He was to stand the temptations of Satan upon all points wherewith man would be assailed.<sup>30</sup>**

In the great controversy worldview, Jesus' primary purpose was not to be our Substitute but to be our Example and to vindicate God's character. Importantly, the great controversy worldview assumes that Jesus kept the law as a man with a "fallen" human nature. His example, therefore, is to demonstrate that all people can achieve freedom from sin if they pray and self-sacrifice as He did. The normal Christian understanding of Jesus as an example is that He shows those who are born again how they may depend upon God after being born of the Spirit. Adventism, however, sees Jesus as the example for all sinful mankind to follow in order to become right with God. Here are some of EGW's statements:

**He came to this world to live the law in humanity, that Satan's charge that man cannot keep the law might be demonstrated as false.<sup>31</sup>**

**The Majesty of heaven undertook the cause of man, and with the same facilities that man may obtain, withstood the temptations of Satan as man must withstand them. This was the only way in which fallen man could become a partaker of the divine nature.<sup>32</sup>**

**The glory of Christ is his character, and his character is an expression of the law of God. He fulfilled the law in its every specification, and gave to the world in his life a perfect pattern of what it is possible for humanity to attain unto by cooperation with divinity.<sup>33</sup>**

We could quote many more EGW statements demonstrating that the great controversy model sees Jesus as the example for sinful people. This unbiblical description of Jesus, however, is only part of Adventism's belief about Him. EGW also states that Jesus was on probation while He was on the earth and that He could have sinned. For example:

**The temptations to which Christ was subjected were a terrible reality. As a free agent He was placed on probation, with liberty to yield to Satan's temptations and work at cross-purposes with God.<sup>34</sup>**

**Yet into the world where Satan claimed dominion God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe, subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss.<sup>35</sup>**

**For a period of time Christ was on probation. He took humanity on Himself, to stand the test and trial which the first Adam failed to endure. Had He failed in His test and trial, He would have been disobedient to the voice of God, and the world would have been lost.<sup>36</sup>**

The great controversy further teaches that Jesus died to exonerate God's law and make it possible for us to become perfect:

**When Christ gave His life for you, it was that He might place you on vantage ground and impart to you moral power.<sup>37</sup>**

**Jesus was bearing the sin of the world; he was enduring the curse of the law; he was vindicating the justice of God. Separation from his Father, the punishment for transgression, was to fall upon him in order to magnify God's law and testify to its immutability. And this was forever to settle the controversy between Satan and the Prince of heaven in regard to the changeless character of that law.<sup>38</sup>**

**In making His infinite sacrifice Christ would exalt and honor the law.<sup>39</sup>**

**He died to make an atonement, and to become a pattern for everyone who would be His disciple.<sup>40</sup>**

Furthermore, the great controversy states that Jesus' mediation is only for a limited time and His sacrifice for sin will end when the great controversy is over. EGW says this:

**To hold the people in darkness and impenitence till the Savior's mediation is ended,**

**and there is no longer a sacrifice for sin, is the object which he [Satan] seeks to accomplish.<sup>41</sup>**

The Bible teaches, however, that Jesus came to be a sacrifice for sin once for all, and His priesthood is permanent. He lives forever to intercede for His people (Heb. 8:24-25). Furthermore, He cleanses our consciences "from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14). He came to fulfill the law, not to establish it as God's measure of our righteousness. Rather, we "have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

Moreover, Jesus did not come with a fallen nature, nor was He divested of His full deity and power (Col. 1:19; 2:9). He was never exalted to be equal to God but was eternal, almighty God (Is. 9:6). "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn. 1:1). Moreover, Jesus identified Himself with the personal name of God, "I Am" (Jn. 8:58).

Jesus was Satan's creator (Jn. 1:3); He was never in competition or in a battle with Satan. Jesus is God—not Michael the archangel or any lesser being exalted to be equal to God.

Finally, Jesus overturned death. While the resurrection is a central theme of the New Testament, it receives only passing mention in the great controversy paradigm. Yet Scripture tells us His resurrection life is what gives us our eternal life when we are born again (Rom. 5:10; 8:10-11). He has already been seated at the right hand of God and forever intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25).

## **Man in the great controversy**

The great controversy model depends on the belief that humans are physical beings without immaterial spirits. Furthermore, Adventists believe that sin is transmitted genetically. Their Fundamental Belief #7 says in part,

**Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit [breath]... When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and ...the image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil.<sup>42</sup>**

Adventists believe that the "breath of life" is the literal breath, or air, that one breathes. They compare it to "streams of electricity that...transform a quiet, gray panel of glass in a box into a pulsating splash of color and action when we flip the switch on a color TV."<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, Adventists assume the image of God in man includes a physical resemblance. Seventh-day Adventists Believe states:

**Since the Bible teaches that man comprises an indivisible unity of body, mind, and soul, man's physical features must also, in some way, reflect God's image. But isn't God a spirit? How could a spirit being be associated with any form or shape?**

**A brief study of the angels reveals that they, like God, are spiritual beings...Yet they always appear in human form...Could it be that a spiritual being may have a "spiritual body" with a form and features...?**

**The Bible indicates that some people have seen parts of God's person....Christ is described as "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and "the express image of His person" (Heb. 1:3). These passages seem to indicate that God is a personal being and has a personal form. This should come as no surprise, for man was created in the image of God.<sup>44</sup>**

The great controversy worldview assumes man is body plus breath, not a body with a spirit that can worship God (Jn 4:24), that can be deeply moved and troubled (Jn. 11:33), or that goes to the Father at death (Lk. 23:46). Without a spirit, humans cannot be spiritually dead in a literal sense. Adventists do not believe that humans are born depraved, unable to obey or please God apart from a divine intervention. Scripture says we are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). "No one understand; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:11-12).

Rather, EGW teaches that sin is a choice we make:

**It is not in the power of Satan to force anyone to sin. Sin is the sinner's individual act.... Through prayer and the word of God we shall be enabled to overcome temptation.<sup>45</sup>**

**By faith and prayer all may meet the requirements of the gospel. No man can be forced to transgress.<sup>46</sup>**

Because Adventism assumes a false understanding of man's nature, they also have a false belief about Christ's nature. Since man is a physical being with "higher powers" in his physical mind, they understand sin to be transmitted through the gene pool. Thus a fallen or sinful nature is defined as inherited weaknesses and tendencies to evil. Therefore, Jesus the man had a "fallen nature" but overcame temptation and showed us how we, too, can conquer sin by prayer and faith.

Without immaterial spirits, humans have no way to be "born of the Spirit", or "born again" (Jn. 3:3, 5). Instead, the new birth within Adventism is a mental change, the Holy Spirit enlightening the mind, a



decision to be baptized. Because they do not believe in a literal human spirit, they have no understanding that Jesus was conceived with spiritual life. He was the Son of God, not the son of Adam. His spirit was alive from the moment He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was the only human born who did not need to be born again.

Since the great controversy assumes that obedient people will demonstrate that God's law is fair and will thus vindicate God's character to a watching universe, it is not surprising that salvation and our highest loyalty are defined by Law. EGW said,

**Satan had asserted that men could not keep the commandments of God. To prove that they could, Christ became a man, and lived a life of perfect obedience, an evidence to sinful human beings, to the worlds unfallen, and to the heavenly angels, that man could keep God's law through the divine power that is abundantly provided for all that believe.<sup>47</sup>**





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**Other web resources not included in the printed version of this article from [EllenWhiteExposed.com](http://EllenWhiteExposed.com) concerning [Ellen G. White's](http://EllenWhiteExposed.com) book *The Great Controversy*, the source of the great controversy worldview:**

- [Myth: Ellen White received the Great Controversy in vision](#)
- [Historical errors in Great Controversy](#)
- [The Albigensians as presented in Great Controversy chapters 6 and 15](#)
- [The Interdicts of 1411 and 1412](#)
- [Ellen White's Visions of Martin Luther](#)
- [The Diet of Speyer, 1529](#)
- [The 3.5 years of the French Revolution](#)
- [1755 Earthquake, 1780 Dark Day, 1833 Meteor Shower](#)
- [Josiah Litch's predictions](#)
- [Rappings and Spiritualism](#)
- [Great Controversy Plagiarism. An in-depth chapter-by-chapter study of the plagiarism in the Great Controversy by Walter Rea. 125-](#)

## Biblical Worldview

### GOD

- revealed by Jesus
- sovereign over creation including evil
- all-powerful
- does not owe creatures explanations
- gave law to reveal sin
- gave Son to substitute for humans
- gave humans one way to be saved: Jesus



### JESUS

- eternal Son, second person of the Trinity
- God incarnate in human flesh but with unfallen nature
- Born with living spirit—never needed to be born again
- once-for-all sacrifice—the propitiation for our sin
- our Substitute, took God's wrath for our sin
- could not sin nor could He have failed in His mission
- eternally our intercessor



### MAN

- possesses immaterial spirit separate from the mortal body
- born with spirits dead in sin; innately sinners
- unable to resist temptation even by prayer
- saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone
- born of the Spirit and transferred from domain of darkness
- spirit made alive with Jesus' resurrection life

### GOSPEL

- Jesus died, was buried, and was raised on the third day; mission complete
- Jesus' blood was propitiation for our sin
- Jesus is the scapegoat
- Jesus' resurrection life is what brings our spirits to life
- we are saved by repenting and receiving the Lord Jesus and His sacrifice
- we are sealed with the indwelling Holy Spirit; born again
- God's Spirit in us guarantees our eternal future



## Great Controversy Worldview

### GOD

- revealed by law
- accused by Satan of unfairness
- limits power over creatures to protect their free-will
- must answer Satan's accusations
- sent Jesus as example to vindicate the law
- saves those who honor the law and reproduce the character of Christ



### JESUS

- exalted to be equal with God making Lucifer jealous
- incarnate in sinful flesh with fallen nature
- possessed inherited tendencies to evil yet resisted sin
- our example; showed us how to overcome sin
- paid the price for our past sins
- could have sinned, did not know He would rise
- mediation and intercession will end



### MAN

- made in God's physical image
- does not possess immaterial spirit (like an animal)
- born with inherited tendencies to sin
- must learn to pray like Jesus and resist temptation
- forgiven for past sins, must stay saved by obedience
- dies without knowing if saved
- knowledge of salvation revealed at Jesus' coming

### GOSPEL

- Jesus died for sin; applies His blood in heaven since 1844
- Jesus' blood is "down payment" on our sin (breaking the law)
- Satan is scapegoat
- we are saved when we perfectly reflect Christ's character (the law)
- resurrection merely promises we will be re-created
- we are sealed or marked by keeping the Sabbath
- we will stand without a mediator during the tribulation



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## Summary statement

In order to see clearly how the great controversy paradigm warps Adventists' belief about reality, we'll summarize what we've said so far before concluding with a final look at Adventism's deceptive worldview. The great controversy:

- depends on the extra-biblical writings of Ellen White, their "continuing and authoritative source of truth".
- teaches a "different Jesus", one who is not Mighty God, the I AM, but a diminished one who took man's fallen nature, was on probation, and could have sinned, thus threatening the existence of the cosmos and God Himself.48
- falsifies the identity and person of God by equating His character with the law.
- gives Satan illegitimate power and freedom.
- claims God is obligated to answer to Satan.
- says Christ's atonement was not finished at the cross but continues through the alleged controversy.
- teaches Christ's mediation will end, and there will no longer be a sacrifice for sin.
- replaces Jesus as our total Substitute with Jesus as our Example.
- replaces Jesus with Satan as the scapegoat who ultimately bears away the sins of the saved.
- falsifies the nature of man by denying the human spirit.
- claims the "the righteousness of God" is obedience to the Ten Commandments.
- substitutes the new birth by the Holy Spirit with conversion to Adventism and law-keeping.
- says salvation depends on our knowledge of good and evil to inform the right choice.
- replaces the Lord Jesus as the test of faith with loyalty to Adventist teachings.

## Living in a deceptive worldview

The great controversy worldview is the Adventists' definition of reality. Just as they are taught that grass is green, so they learn that God identifies Himself with Law. Because the law is the transcript of

God's character and Satan has said that law is unfair, humans' only hope lies in knowing what is good and what is evil so they can make right choices.

Although Adventists use all the words Christians use when referring to God and salvation, they internally mean the definitions established by the great controversy. They believe their replication of Jesus' obedient character will finally bring this controversy to an end. Thus, they finally have the power to vindicate God's reputation and expose Satan as a fraud. Satan, therefore, is relentless in provoking and deceiving those who desire to serve God, while Jesus stands before them as a continuous example of sinless perfection which they must emulate. In this way each person becomes a player in the controversy as he grows in the knowledge of good and evil, the reputation of God and His law hanging on his shoulders.

Martin Carey has summarized the great controversy worldview like this:

**When God's sovereignty is reduced, Satan or nature must fill the vacuum. The great controversy's god can be accused and put on the defensive with a 'meaningful' trial he can very possibly lose. We are also told, however, that natural and moral laws are sovereign. They cannot be questioned and can never fail. Therefore, the laws represent higher realities than God. The great controversy creates a dualistic cosmos that limits the power and control of God and expands the power of Satan and the laws. God must answer to Satan, and we must answer to the laws. God requires lesser beings, such as Jesus and a human "remnant", to vindicate and rescue His sovereignty. Great controversy theory removes all the sound reasons why we should believe any of its god's prophecies or promises of success because they depend upon human obedience and faithfulness. The doubts that great controversy theory raises help explain why so many Adventists become agnostic. Their god has already been discredited and dethroned.**

The great controversy worldview is the unexamined assumption Adventists have accepted as truth. It shapes every aspect of their lives. Instead of this worldview describing the biblical truth of man's sin and Jesus' complete atonement through His death, burial, and resurrection, it puts the burden of being worthy of salvation on their own shoulders. Their belief that they have "the truth" and their failure to measure up to "truth's" standards often results in despair, depression and guilt. They may use the same gospel words evangelicals use, but their worldview equates honoring God with keeping the law. Instead of trusting the finished work of Christ, they are striving to finish the work of Christ.

Somehow they misunderstand Christ's last words: "It is finished." †

#### Endnotes

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