

THE WAR BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

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Contents

Introduction	7	
Chapter 1	The War Behind All Wars	9
Chapter 2	The Central Issue: Love or Selfishness?	18
Chapter 3	Light Shines in the Darkness	27
Chapter 4	Standing for the Truth	35
Chapter 5	Faith Against All Odds	46
Chapter 6	The Two Witnesses	54
Chapter 7	Motivated by Hope	62
Chapter 8	Light From the Sanctuary	73
Chapter 9	The Foundation of God's Government	81
Chapter 10	Spiritualism Exposed	90
Chapter 11	The Impending Conflict	99
Chapter 12	Earth's Closing Events	107
Chapter 13	The Triumph of God's Love	117

1

The War Behind All Wars

Peter was only seventeen years old when he was killed by a speeding drunk driver on a narrow country road. Maureen was shocked when her doctor diagnosed her with lung cancer at thirty-eight years old. She had never smoked a day in her life. Harry was heartbroken when his eight-year-old son was diagnosed with leukemia. Sadly, life often hands us the unexpected. Tragedy seems to lurk around every corner, and we ask ourselves, *Where is God when disaster strikes?*

Bombs drop. Cities are destroyed. The elements rage. Hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and typhoons strike at a moment's notice. Out of our confusion, we wonder why innocent people suffer. How can a God of love allow such evil to reign in the world? Why do bad things happen to good people?

One thing is obvious. We live in a world of good and evil, a world of love and hate, a world of happiness and sadness. There is a great controversy raging in the universe between good and evil, but ultimately, right will triumph over wrong.

A God of love

The Bible teaches that God's nature is love (1 John 4:7, 8). All His

The War Between Good and Evil

actions are loving (Jeremiah 31:3). True love can never be forced, coerced, or demanded. Genuine love requires the voluntary submission of the will. Ellen White states it well when she writes, “Only by love is love awakened.”¹ The apostle Paul declares, “The love of Christ compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). The word *compel* means to prompt or motivate. A Christian’s actions are motivated by Christ’s love; they are a result of voluntary submission to Jesus Christ.

To deny the power of choice is to destroy the possibility of being truly happy. God wins our allegiance by showing us His love. He is dealing with the great controversy between good and evil in such a way that sin will never again lift its ugly head. God’s goal is to demonstrate before the entire universe that He has the best interest of His creatures in view. In the end, Christ’s eternal plans for this planet in rebellion will succeed. The purposes for His people will be accomplished.

A cosmic conflict

The Bible’s last book, Revelation, describes a cosmic conflict between good and evil. John, the last of the apostles, writes from the rocky shores of Patmos: “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:7–9).

These verses draw aside the curtain between heaven and Earth, giving us a glimpse of the conflict between good and evil. Satan and his angels warred against Christ and were eventually cast out of heaven. The description of this struggle leads to some significant questions: Did a loving God create a demonic angel that initiated the war in heaven? Was there some fatal flaw in this angel that led him to rebel against God?

The Bible clearly explains the origin of evil and God’s ultimate solution to the sin problem. He did not create the devil; He created

The War Behind All Wars

a being of dazzling brightness named Lucifer. This angelic being had no flaws or imperfections (Ezekiel 28:12–15). Like all created beings, he was created with the power of choice—a fundamental principle of God’s government. Sin originated with Lucifer in heaven itself, and nothing explains why this perfect angel allowed pride and jealousy to take root in his heart and grow into rebellion against his Creator (Isaiah 14:12–14).

Lucifer, a created being, desired the worship that belonged only to the Creator. He attempted to usurp God’s throne by questioning His authority. His rebellion led to open warfare in heaven.

Although God bore long with Lucifer, eventually, He could no longer allow him to infect heaven with his rebellion. “The heavenly councils pleaded with Lucifer. The Son of God presented before him the greatness, the goodness, and the justice of the Creator, and the sacred, unchanging nature of His law. God Himself had established the order of heaven; and in departing from it, Lucifer would dishonor his Maker and bring ruin upon himself. But the warning, given in infinite love and mercy, only aroused a spirit of resistance.”²

In that heavenly struggle, Jesus defeated Satan. As Revelation 12:8 describes, the devil and his evil angels “did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.” In the great controversy between Christ and Satan, evil may appear to be triumphing over righteousness, but Jesus will be victorious at last. It is reassuring to recognize that He has never lost a battle with Satan. He is the heavenly Warrior who battles Satan on our behalf and enables us, through His power and by His grace, to triumph over the powers of hell.

The father of lies

Satan is a liar (John 8:44), and he misrepresented the character of God before the heavenly angels, picturing Him as a tyrant demanding obedience but withholding love. One-third of the angels accepted his cunning deceptions (Revelation 12:4).

The War Between Good and Evil

There was no reason for this rebellion against God's government. Until this time, heaven was filled with joy and harmony. There was no taint of discontent until Satan's pride ripened into open rebellion. He accused God of being unjust and unfair. He infected the angels with his doubts and accusations.

What was the nature of this war that broke out in heaven? We are not sure, but the conflict was physical enough that Satan and his angels were "cast out," and no place was "found for them in heaven any longer" (verses 8, 9). One thing is certain. Every angel had to decide whether they were for or against Christ. Who would they follow? Whose voice would they listen to?

The loyal angels chose to be obedient to Christ's loving commands, while one-third of the angels listened to the voice of Lucifer, disobeyed God, and lost heaven. We, too, in this critical time of Earth's history, are called to decide for or against Christ.

The God-given power of choice

When God created humanity, He embedded deep within our brains the ability to think, reason, and choose. The essence of our humanness is the ability to make moral choices. We are not mere robots. Created in God's image, we are different from animals, having the ability to make moral choices and live by spiritual principles. From the time of Lucifer's rebellion in heaven, through the centuries, God has called His people to respond to His love and be obedient to His commands by choosing to serve Him.

There are some vital lessons we can learn by studying this battle between good and evil. First, God is not responsible for the bad things that happen to good people. There is an evil force in the universe that is battling against Him and misrepresenting His character. Second, we are not spectators in this controversy between good and evil—we are participants. The battle for loyalty rages in our hearts, and Satan is attempting to steal our allegiance from God. And last, if we surrender

The War Behind All Wars

our lives to Him, Christ will defeat Satan and drive him out of our lives, just as He drove Him out of heaven.

Earth becomes involved

When God created Earth, He created it in a perfect state. The Bible says that God “saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). There was no stain of sin or evil anywhere. But God gave Adam and Eve the same freedom of choice He had given to Lucifer. God did not want robots on Earth any more than He wanted robots in heaven.

In fact, God went out of His way to make this freedom clear. He planted a tree in the Garden of Eden called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told Adam and Eve not to eat of its fruit. He wanted to make sure they knew they had a choice.

On one occasion, however, Eve happened by the tree and fell into conversation with Satan, who was speaking through a serpent. I imagine the exchange went something like this: “Eve, if you eat of this tree, you will enter a new sphere of existence. You will experience an excitement that you have never known before. You will have unimaginable happiness. God is keeping something from you. Here, take the forbidden fruit, and eat it.” When Eve, and later Adam, listened to the voice of the evil one and rebelled against the clear command of God, they opened a door that God wanted to keep shut forever. It was the doorway to sin—the doorway to suffering, heartache, sickness, and death.

At its core, sin is rebellion against God. It leads to separation from God (1 John 3:4; Isaiah 59:1, 2). Since God is the source of life, separation from God leads to death. It also leads to worry, anxiety, sickness, and disease. The suffering we see in our world is ultimately the result of living on a planet in rebellion against God. This does not mean that every time we suffer or get sick, we have sinned, but it does mean that every one of us is affected by living on a sin-sick planet.

The War Between Good and Evil

Love finds a way

Let us look at the scene in Eden again. Adam and Eve had sinned, and God had told them that they had to leave their garden home. From now on, toil and suffering would be their lot. Tears ran down their faces. Would they have to suffer and finally die with no hope? Would death be the end of everything?

It was at this point, as Adam and Eve were weeping in despair, that God gave them the promise recorded in Genesis 3:15. Looking directly at Satan, the serpent, He said:

“I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel.”

Adam and Eve may not have fully understood the magnitude of God’s plan at that moment, but they knew they could hope again. In some way, through the Seed of the woman, their redemption would come.

The Seed of the woman, of course, is Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). On the cross, Satan bruised His heel. But Jesus’ victory is our guarantee that one day the serpent’s head will be crushed, and the door of suffering and death that Adam and Eve opened will be closed.

You may wonder, *Why doesn’t God do something about this sin problem?* He has. Right there in the Garden, He gave Adam and Eve a glimpse of hope. He promised to send the Messiah to reveal His self-sacrificing love and redeem them from the clutches of the evil one.

Centuries later, Jesus came to this planet in rebellion. He lived the perfect life we should have lived, faced Satan’s temptations head on, and was victorious. Jesus experienced every temptation we may ever experience. He knows our weaknesses, understands our frailties, and

The War Behind All Wars

identifies with our struggles. His death on the cross provides eternal life for us. The Bible tells us that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), we deserve eternal death, but Jesus died the death we deserve to die so we can experience eternal life. He bore the guilt of our sins on Calvary’s cross. Jesus suffered the death that was ours so one day we can live the life that was His. He took upon Himself the curse of sin, was condemned for sins He never committed, and experienced the agony that sinners will feel in their lostness (Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:9).

In the life and death of Christ, we see the Father’s love revealed. “In the banishment of Satan from heaven, God declared His justice and maintained the honor of His throne. But when man had sinned through yielding to the deceptions of this apostate spirit, God gave an evidence of His love by yielding up His only-begotten Son to die for the fallen race. In the atonement the character of God is revealed. The mighty argument of the cross demonstrates to the whole universe that the course of sin which Lucifer had chosen was in no wise chargeable upon the government of God.”³ Christ’s death on the cross reveals to the whole universe the magnificence of God’s love. It answers the question Satan raised against God’s government. In Christ, we have the assurance that one day we can live eternally.

Do you ever wonder whether God really loves you? Look at the cross. Look at the crown of thorns. Look at the nails in His hands and feet. With every drop of blood that Jesus shed on Calvary, God is saying, “I love you. I do not want to be in heaven without you. Yes, you have sinned; you sold yourself into the hand of the enemy, but I have paid the ransom to get you back.” When you look at the cross, you never again have to wonder whether you are loved.

The Bible speaks of a Jesus who came to this world and experienced heartache, disappointment, and pain in common with all humanity.

The War Between Good and Evil

It reveals a Christ who faced the same temptations we face, a Christ who triumphed over the principalities and powers of hell, both in His life and through His death on the cross. As Ellen White states in *The Desire of Ages*: “He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With His stripes we are healed.’”⁴

We can rejoice because Jesus reversed the curse of sin and offers us eternal life. Ponder this remarkable statement. “The cross of Calvary, while it declares the law immutable, proclaims to the universe that the wages of sin is death. In the Saviour’s expiring cry, ‘It is finished,’ the death knell of Satan was rung. The great controversy which had been so long in progress was then decided, and the final eradication of evil was made certain. The Son of God passed through the portals of the tomb, that ‘through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.’ Hebrews 2:14.”⁵

Inexpressible love

Not only did Jesus do something for us on the cross, but He is doing something for us right now. Having conquered the grave, our resurrected Lord is now our great High Priest, providing everything we need to be saved, overcome Satan’s temptations, and live in God’s kingdom forever.

At this moment, Jesus knows about your discouragement and despair. He knows what it is like to be rejected, alone, and heart-broken. The apostle Paul writes in Hebrews 4:15, 16 that Jesus “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly [confidently] to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

To state it simply, Jesus presents us before the universe as clothed in His righteousness, perfect in His victory, and adopted into the family of God through His sacrifice on the cross. Everything we should have

The War Behind All Wars

been, He was. In Christ, there is no condemnation for the sins of our past (see Romans 8:1). When we confess our sins, God freely forgives us (1 John 1:9). In Christ, our guilt is gone, and through His mighty intercession, the grip of sin on our lives is broken. The chains that bind us are loosed, and we are free.

Ellen White describes Christ's longing desire for each one of us in these poignant words: "When the great sacrifice had been consummated, Christ ascended on high, refusing the adoration of angels until He had presented the request: 'I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am.' John 17:24. Then with inexpressible love and power came forth the answer from the Father's throne: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him.' Hebrews 1:6. Not a stain rested upon Jesus. His humiliation ended, His sacrifice completed, there was given unto Him a name that is above every name."⁶

There is nothing Jesus wants more than to have us with Him in heaven. The longing of His soul, the desire of His heart, and the reason for His death and intercession in heaven's sanctuary is to save us. Do you have a special need in your life? Come with confidence and tell it to Jesus. Although the great controversy still rages and the evil one viciously attacks God's faithful followers, Christ has promised to "never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

1. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1940), 22.

2. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1911), 494, 495.

3. White, 500, 501.

4. White, *Desire of Ages*, 25.

5. White, *Great Controversy*, 503.

6. White, 501, 502.