

The Great Controversy {RH September 7, 1897}

By E.G. White

We are living in the closing scenes of this earth's history, and what is now done for God is accomplished under the most disadvantageous circumstances. Satan has great skill and wonderful ability. God entrusted him with power and wisdom; but he became filled with self-exaltation and thought that he should be first in heaven. Through this self-seeking, this striving for the supremacy, sin entered into the world.

Satan resolved to make an effort to overthrow the government of God, and set up a kingdom of his own. He began this work by doing just as men who ought to know better are doing today. He complained of the supposed defects in the management of heavenly things, and sought to fill the minds of the angels with his disaffection. Because he was not supreme, he sowed seeds of doubt and unbelief. Because he was not as God, he strove to instil into the minds of the angels his own envy and dissatisfaction. Thus the seeds of alienation were planted, afterward to be drawn out and presented before the heavenly courts as originating, not with Satan, but with the angels. So the deceiver would show that the angels thought as he did.

It was most difficult to make the deceiving power of Satan apparent. His power to deceive increased with practice. If he could not defend himself, he must accuse, in order to appear just and righteous, and to make God appear arbitrary and exacting. In secret he whispered his disaffection to the angels. There was at first no pronounced feeling against God; but the seed had been sown, and the love and confidence of the angels was marred. The sweet communion between them and their God was broken. Every move was watched; every action was viewed in the light in which Satan had made them see things.

That which Satan had instilled into the minds of the angels—a word here and a word there—opened the way for a long list of suppositions. In his artful way he drew expressions of doubt from them. Then, when he was interviewed, he accused those whom he had educated. He laid all the disaffection on the ones he had led. As one in holy office, he manifested an overbearing desire for justice, but it was a counterfeit of justice, which was entirely contrary to God's love and compassion and mercy.

Just such transactions are taking place today. Many place such confidence in their own ideas that they present their theories as if they could make no mistake. Once their words are spoken, they never go back, never repent, never feel that they need forgiveness. They feel that they are infallible. Thus it has been in past history; thus it will be again. False religious confidence becomes supposed infallibility. How can these deluded ones think that they are the only ones led and taught of God? When this spirit is manifested, what can be done? You cannot convince them, because they say, "God has led me." They will not acknowledge that they have acted on wrong principles. They maintain that they have moved rightly. The only course that can be pursued is to leave them to develop their principles. They may never see their error, but others may be convinced and saved. To attempt to unmask them would be to call sympathy to their side.

Great efforts will be made by those who suppose their own wisdom to be supreme, in exactly the same lines on which Satan worked, and which caused so much mischief in the paradise of God. The very same principles are revealed and upheld today. When a man is elected to a position of trust, to preside over important interests, large and broad, or over interests of less extent, but still important, Satan stirs up the minds of those who are selfish, who are not consecrated to God's service, who have not an eye single to his glory. He fills their hearts with the spirit of criticizing and accusing. If they think that they are not especially favored, they will talk of the mistakes and errors of the one against whom they are working. This step taken, Satan, whose special business it is to create alienation and strife, will place the matter before these persons in a most deceiving way, and they will bring against those in positions of trust the most unjust charges, in order to discourage and destroy God's servants.

Satan's representations against the government of God, and his defense of those who sided with him, were a constant accusation against God. His murmurings and complaints were groundless; and yet God allowed him to work out his theory. God could have destroyed Satan and all his sympathizers as easily as one can pick up a pebble and cast it to the earth. But by so doing he would have given a precedent for the exercise of force. All the compelling power is found only under Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order. He would not work on this line. He would not give the slightest encouragement for any human being to set himself up as God over another human being, feeling at liberty to cause him physical or mental suffering. This principle is wholly of Satan's creation.

The principles of the character of God were the foundation of the education constantly kept before the heavenly angels. These principles were goodness, mercy, and love. Self-evidencing light was to be recognized and freely accepted by all who occupied positions of trust and power. They must accept God's principles, and, through the presentation of truth and righteousness, convince all who were in his service. This was the only power to be used. Force must never come in. All who thought that their position gave them power to command their fellow beings, and control conscience, must be deprived of their position; for this is not God's plan.

These principles are to be the foundation of education in God's church today. The rules given by him are to be observed and respected. God has enjoined this. His government is moral. Nothing is to be done by compulsion. Truth is to be the prevailing power. All service is to be done willingly, and for the love of God. All who are honored with positions of influence are to represent God; for when officiating, they are in the place of God. In everything their actions must correspond to the importance of their position. The higher the position the more distinctly will self-sacrifice be revealed if they are fit for the office. Every heart that is controlled by these principles will be loyal. But when those who profess to be in God's service resort to accusation, they are adopting Satan's principles to cast out Satan; and this never will work.

In the councils of heaven it was decided that principles must be acted upon that would not at once destroy Satan's power; for it was God's purpose to place things upon an eternal basis of security. Time must be given for Satan to develop the principles which were the foundation of his government. The heavenly universe must see worked out the principles which Satan

declared were superior to God's principles. God's order must be contrasted with Satan's order. The corrupting principles of Satan's rule must be revealed. The principles of righteousness expressed in God's law must be demonstrated as unchangeable, perfect, eternal.

The Lord saw the use Satan was making of his powers, and he set before him truth in contrast with falsehood. Time and time again during the controversy, Satan was ready to be convinced, ready to admit that he was wrong. But those he had deceived were also ready to accuse him of leaving them. What should he do?—submit to God, or continue in a course of deception? He chose to deny truth, to take refuge in misstatements and fraud.

The Lord allowed Satan to go on, and demonstrate his principles. God did reveal that his principles were right, and he carried the worlds unfallen and the heavenly universe with him; but it was at a terrible cost. His only begotten Son was given up as Satan's victim. The Lord Jesus Christ revealed a character entirely opposite to that of Satan. As the high priest laid aside his gorgeous, pontifical robes, and officiated in the white linen dress of a common priest, so Christ emptied himself, and took the form of a servant, and offered the sacrifice, himself the priest, himself the victim.

By causing the death of the Sovereign of heaven, Satan defeated his own purpose. The death of the Son of God made the death of Satan unavoidable. He was allowed to go on until his administration was laid open before the worlds unfallen and before the heavenly universe. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he uprooted himself from the affections of the unfallen beings. He was seen by all to be a liar, a thief, and a murderer.

God sees that the same course of action is being pursued the world over. Men and women come to the place where the road diverges; it is either right or wrong. Thousands upon thousands clothe themselves in what they suppose to be an impenetrable disguise, and choose the wrong. An attempt to make their course plain to others by abrupt disclosures would only cause a larger number to choose the side of wrong. Thus, the wrong-doers would be sustained, and many souls would be ruined.

Today Satan is working upon human minds by his crooked principles. These will be adopted and acted upon by some who claim to be loyal and true to God's government. How shall we know that they are disloyal and untrue?—"By their fruits ye shall know them." God does not force anyone. He leaves all free to choose. But he says, "By their fruits ye shall know them." The Lord will not write as wise those who cannot distinguish between a tree that bears thorn-berries and a tree that bears olives.

Individually, we are deciding our eternal destiny, deciding whether we shall enjoy the highest honor that can be given to man, even an eternal weight of glory, or be ranked with Satan by possessing his character, by dishonoring God because we profess to be Christians while misrepresenting Christ. Those who choose to reveal the character of the arch-deceiver identify themselves with him beyond the possibility of a change, because they choose not to see themselves as wrong. This was the course that Satan pursued. — RH September 7, 1897, par 16