



THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

The Blind Men and the Elephant

January 15, 2022

1 PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

Matthew 4:10 (NIV) • “Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.””

Luke 10:17-20 (NIV) • “The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’ He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’”

John 10:7-10 (NIV) • “Therefore Jesus said again, ‘Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.’”

Romans 6:16-18 (NIV) • “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that,

though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”

Romans 8:28-31 (NIV) • “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

James 4:4 (NIV) • “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”

1 John 2:15,16 (NIV) • “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.”

“The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan’s deceptive power was to be broken.

This could not be done by force. . . . To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22).

(See also Ezekiel 28:13-19; Ephesians 6:10-18, and additional passages in student material.)

B. WHAT’S TO BE SAID ABOUT “THE GREAT CONTROVERSY”

This week we look at what it means to be caught in the cross fire of the cosmic spiritual battle, and how to safeguard the heart and mind in the quest toward eventual and eternal victory. The fight is about character—God’s character. Some might imagine God and Satan dueling vicious blows back and forth. But Satan is a being created by God, and God could destroy the enemy in a heartbeat. But love is more powerful than might, and God is true to His system of government of love and freedom.

Several themes emerge from this supernatural scenario: (1) that God’s character is questioned; (2) that human perceptions are narrow and short-sighted; (3) that Satan attacks from the inside and the outside; and (4) how God’s citizens are to live in light of Satan’s certain demise. Ultimately this lesson is about seeing God for who He really is and not just basing our perception of God on one-second snapshots. As we look more carefully, we see more clearly, and our loyalty to our King deepens.

C. WHERE WE’RE GOING WITH “THE GREAT CONTROVERSY”

As a result of this lesson we would like the students to be able to:

1. Observe the ways that perceptions govern relationships.
2. Distinguish the character qualities of both God and Lucifer.
3. Choose not to smear, but to clear God’s name in their daily lives.

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) an adult church member with an interesting life, strips of paper with questions to ask; (Activity B) bowl of mixed fruits (or other items), paper, pens/pencils.

Connecting • Bibles, student lessons.

Applying • (Activity A) Bibles, student lessons; (Activity B) copies of “Children’s Letters to God” (on the website).

2 BRIDGING

A. WHERE WE’VE BEEN

Allow 10 minutes at the beginning of class for students to:

1. Share anything that was meaningful to them in this lesson.
2. Engage in a discussion about the topic of the lesson in connection to the belief highlighted this week.
3. Say the Bible memory text either individually or in a group.

B. OTHER SABBATH SCHOOL COMPONENTS

- >> Song service
- >> Mission emphasis (find a link for Adventist *Mission* for youth and adults at www.realtimemission.net)
- >> Service project reports

3 BEGINNING

NOTE TO TEACHER: Put together your own program with options from the categories below—Beginning, Connecting, Applying, and Closing. Please keep in mind, however, that the students need to have an opportunity to be interactive (participate actively *and* with one another) and to study from the Word.

A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • Choose someone from your congregation who has an interesting life that the students already know something about. The object is to deepen and broaden the students' perception of this person by asking the person questions that give the students a much clearer sense of who this person is.

Get set • Give the students strips of paper with questions to ask the person, such as how they grew up, what their school experience was like, accomplishments that have gone unnoticed, hobbies, skills, embarrassing moments, and so on.

Go • Call on the various students with question strips to ask the questions one at a time.

Debriefing • Thank the person for participating and let them leave. Then **ask: What was your first impression of this person or original perception before they shared? What did you discover that was new? Think about how you form an opinion of someone. To what degree are first impressions true? And how can they be false? Why? What personal experiences can you think of in which your first impressions were true/false?**

Ask: Could it be that the reason people come to God or walk away from Him has to do with their initial impressions or perceptions of Him? How much knowledge do people need to make a truly informed decision about God?

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Bring a bowl of mixed fruit (or any other combination of items). Have students sit in a circle around the bowl or items. **Say: I want you to be observers and write a careful and thorough description of what you see in front of you.** Have students read their observations and remark on the wide range of perceptions. Some will be detailed, some thematic, some general. (You might have them pair up with someone else to share their observations

before they report to the whole class.)

Ask: Everyone is looking at the same thing. However, everyone described it differently. How does this illustrate people and their perceptions of God?

C. BEGINNING ILLUSTRATION

In your own words, tell the following story:

The Duke of Wellington commanded the victorious forces at the great battle of Waterloo that effectively ended the Napoleonic Wars. The story has been told that when the battle was over, Wellington sent the great news of his victory to England. A series of stations, one within sight of the next, had been established to send coded messages between England and the European continent. The message to be sent was "Wellington defeated Napoleon at Waterloo." Meanwhile a fog set in and interrupted the message sending. As a result, people saw only "Wellington defeated." Later the fog cleared and the full message continued, which was quite different from the outcome that the people originally thought had happened!

—Michael P. Green, *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), p. 304.

Ask: How much of the message of God's character do you think we have received? (We probably don't have access to all of it, but enough to love and trust Him.) **Is the full message available?** (As much as we need is available in the Bible. We always have to trust Him about some of it.) **What part of the message usually gets fogged out?** (How much He loves us. That He does not bring evil on the world. That His love doesn't mean He isn't serious about getting rid of sin.)

4 CONNECTING

A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM

Present the following ideas in your own words:

Imagine if the day before the Super Bowl or the World Cup you could speed forward in time and know the outcome of the game. If you knew who the winner was going to be, you could side with the winning team. Knowing the winner is kind of a strange luxury, but based on what we know from Scripture, God has already won the great controversy between good and evil. The game is over. The trophy is engraved. The hats and T-shirts are all printed. The parade is about to begin. But the war between God and Satan is not entirely like a ball game. God has conquered sin, He made provision for salvation, He died and paid the debt for humanity's sin, and rose from the grave victorious. It's over! Right? The game *is* over, in a way. But in a way it's not.

Ask: How is the controversy between Christ and Satan not over? The truth is, God may have conquered sin and death, but has He captured your heart? Does He alone have your loyalty and devotion? Everything depends on what you think of Him, doesn't it?

Say: God is right, but the devil does everything in his power to keep people from believing Him. To keep them from seeing the whole picture.

Ask: From what you have heard or what you might think, what are some issues people have that keep them from choosing God as their king?

(Distribute student lessons and refer to the Bible passages in Wednesday's section.)

B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION

Tell, read, or ask a volunteer to read the poem "The Blind Men and the Elephant" from the student lesson.

Ask: How does this poem describe the power of perceptions? How does this relate to the

perceptions people have about God? **Can you think of some analogies?** (The devil tries to blind people to the whole truth about God.) **What are some things that people think God is like because of one quality they have experienced?** (Perhaps they have experienced the death of loved ones and blame the evil on God because He did not prevent it.) **How can they come to see and understand "the whole picture"?** (Through God's Word, the works of His Spirit, and the life of His Son.)

C. CONNECTING TO LIFE

Share the following anecdote:

A person is in line at the grocery store behind a mother and child. When the mother and child move away, the person steps up and sees the cashier taking money from the cash drawer and stuffing it into her pocket. The person suspects that the cashier is stealing, but the cashier smiles as if unperturbed.

Ask: What would be your first impression? (She's a thief, and not a very bright one. Maybe she cashed a check. Give her the benefit of the doubt!)

Share the rest of the anecdote:

As it turned out, the woman with the child had forgotten her wallet at home and had gone all the way through line before noticing. The cashier had paid for the groceries out of her pocket and the grateful woman had promised to return later to repay her. This was verified because the person who witnessed the cashier's behavior called the manager and told what they had seen. The cashier was questioned, and the manager called the concerned person back.

Say: That person's view was narrow. They failed to see the whole picture. The great controversy between Christ and Satan is similar. We see only snapshots of God. Our goal is to be as fully informed about God as we can be by studying His Word, listening to the Holy Spirit, and studying the life of Jesus. Distribute the student lesson. Have the

students look over the passages in Wednesday's section and put a check by the passages that challenge us to make an informed choice one way or another about which kingdom we will be loyal to.

Additional passages to help us be fully informed:

- >> The story of good and evil: **Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:13-19; Revelation 12:7-11.**
- >> God's character: **Jeremiah 31:3, 4; John 3:16; John 10:7-10.**
- >> People who don't know Him and therefore compromise: **Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 7:3; 1 Kings 18:20, 21; 2 Kings 17:33, 41; Matthew 6:24.**
- >> How to be informed citizens of God's kingdom: **Matthew 4:10; Luke 10:17-20; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 John 2:15, 16.**

5 APPLYING

A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Say: In a discussion on the great controversy between Christ and Satan, one teenager responded, "So there's a war between God and the devil. What does that have to do with me? I'm a lover, not a fighter!" All of that may be true, but this controversy is an attack on God's character, and it is an attack on you.

Ask: How does Satan attack us? (From inside and from outside.) Let's find and read **Ephesians 6:10-18**. How does he attack us from the outside? (He pummels us by the working of his demonic forces.) Let's find and read **Romans 7:21-25**. How does he attack us from within? (We are attacked from within by our sinful nature, which has been a part of our bloodline ever since Adam and Eve sinned.)

Present the following ideas in your own words:

If you recall from Friday's section of your lesson, the internal war for your loyalty to God is like having two lions living inside you—the

lion of good and the lion of evil. They fight. If you feed and strengthen the bad lion and starve the good lion, who wins the fight? If you feed both lions equally, what is the outcome? A nasty, exhausting brawl of wills to be loyal to God or be loyal to the self-centered kingdom of Satan. Of course, what happens if you feed the good lion and starve the bad lion? The bad lion loses his ability to conquer day in and day out.

Ask: Of the passages in the Monday and Wednesday sections of your lesson, which one speaks to you personally? What does feeding the good lion inside look like in everyday life? (Prayer, Bible study, service, obedience.) What does feeding the bad lion look like in everyday life? (Giving in to selfishness, being disobedient, feeding our minds on propaganda from the other kingdom.) Do any of you who have already completed Friday's section of the lesson have other answers that you'd like to share with the class?

B. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Agree or disagree: Most people never really think about what they believe to be true about God—they just believe what they see!
2. Either/Or: What do you think is more important to know about the great controversy, why God allows suffering or what He promises to do about it?
3. Continuum: From my viewpoint of the Bible, is God more just or more kind? (There is no precise middle. Pick a side.)
JUST 1 2 3 4 5 6 KIND
4. What are some of the promises of victory in the Monday and Wednesday sections of your lesson?
5. How does knowing how the game will end and who will win help us in our daily fight? What are some specific ways to keep this truth in front of us?
6. Can you think of examples of how people form serious opinions about God without getting accurate information?

7. What does God say about living a double life?
8. How do we overcome the advances of our accuser?

6 CLOSING

SUMMARY

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

The great controversy isn't really about Satan. It's about God. We all know that Satan is wrong, evil, and lost. But God's reputation is on trial. When we see only a small portion of

the picture, it is difficult to choose to be in His kingdom. That is why we have Scripture. God wants more than anything else for you to know the truth about Him. The Scripture is His way of letting you see who He really is. The only way to really know is to look at what He has already revealed and let Him prove His goodness to us in an abiding friendship. Most people would never sign up to be best friends with the devil. But in the middle is where many stay—not committing one way or another. Now, does that make much sense? Again, look at the short-term and long-term benefits of being in God's kingdom. Imagine a time when we will be able to see Him for who He really is, more than just snapshots.



STUDENT LESSON

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY The Blind Men and the Elephant

January 15, 2022

Sabbath FOR STUDY

- » **Memory Text:** “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24, NKJV).
- » **Our Beliefs, no. 8, The Great Controversy:** “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. . . . To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.”
- » Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 109, 110

THE BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT

“It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

“The *First* approached the Elephant,
And, happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl,

‘God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!’

“The *Second*, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, ‘Ho! What have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me ‘tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!’

“The *Third* approached the animal,
And, happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
‘I see,’ quoth he, ‘the Elephant
Is very like a snake!’

“The *Fourth* reached out his eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
‘What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain,’ quoth he;
‘Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!’

“The *Fifth*, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said, ‘E’en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!’

“The *Sixth* no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,

'I see,' quoth he, 'the Elephant
Is very like a rope!'

"And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

"So oft in theologic wars
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
*And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!*"
—John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887).

Sunday RESPONDING

- » Read Romans 5:12.
- » The main reason people stay away from Christianity is that they have a hard time with what other people say about God and what they think they see God doing or not doing in our world. Here are three questions that young and old have shared as to why they don't believe in God or choose to follow Him:
 1. If God is good, then why do evil and bad seem to reign in the world?
 2. If God is all-powerful, why doesn't He do something about pain and suffering?
 3. If God is supposed to be so close, why do I feel only His absence?
- » How would you answer these questions? You may choose one or all.

Monday BIBLE ANSWERS ON THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

» Read Genesis 3:15; Romans 5:12-21; 1 Peter 5:8.

» There has been enmity [hostility] between God and His children and Satan and his followers since Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden. The devil does not want us to trust and know God. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to resist the devil and follow God.

» What do these verses say to you about the great controversy?

» Unscramble the scrambled words and use them to fill in the blanks in the verse below.

lanelf	tehra	nrtoh
iLurfce	escand	nudrog
nngormi	rsta	torhen
naeekdwe	rogenoctiang	ehhgsit

"How you are _____ from heaven, O _____, son of the _____! How you are cut down to the _____, you who _____ the nations! For you have said in your _____: 'I will _____ into heaven, I will exalt my _____ above the _____ of God; I will also sit on the mount of the _____ on the farthest sides of the _____; I will ascend above the _____ of the clouds, I will be like the Most High'" (Isaiah 14:12-14, NKJV).

Tuesday REFLECTING

- » Read Romans 8:19-22.
- » Have you heard songs on the radio or listened to people talk about prayer in the news, magazines, and in movies? The world is not afraid to talk about God anymore, but

what are they saying? The problem is that many know that there is a God, but rarely do people agree on what He is like. While many speculate, Christians have a message about God, and it is not just a snapshot; it is a view of the big picture. If you stand in front of a painting on the wall with your nose two inches from the canvas, you see up close but only a small portion.

- » The great controversy, as explained in the Bible, has been the most amazing topic for many because it paints the big picture, and when you step back to see it, you can make sense out of the little parts in the scene. What if someone had the answer to “Why is this world so bad?” Do you think people might listen? What if someone had the answer to the question “Will there ever be a time when there is no pain?” Do you think people might be curious? What if someone had a good answer to the heart cry “Is God really there, and does He know me?” Do you know some people who might listen? God has spoken to us through His Word, and while we don’t know everything, we see enough of the truth to say, “Choose God. He’s worth it.”

Wednesday BIBLE INSIGHTS

- » Match the words that go with the texts from the New International Version of the Bible. When you match the correct words with their texts, draw a line from the words to their text.

Revelation 12:7-11	LORD hearts serve Philistines
Romans 7:21-25	Israel Ahab Baal follow
Matthew 6:24	worshiped LORD customs nations
2 Kings 17:33	fallen throne clouds Most High
1 Kings 18:20, 21	ancestors Euphrates Amorites household

1 Samuel 7:3	heaven war Michael blood testimony
Joshua 24:15	serve masters God money
Isaiah 14:12-14	law work body Jesus Christ Lord sin

Thursday CONNECTING

- » Read Joshua 24:15.
- » Review the memory text.
- » Young people often say, “I don’t care what others think of me. If they don’t like me for who I am, then forget them!” Is it really true that we don’t care what others think of us? We do care. In fact, God created us with the capacity to care and feel hurt if others don’t care. We may choose to live as if their opinions don’t affect us, but we do care, especially if we are being misunderstood or falsely accused.
- » You can be sure that God cares what you think about Him. The most important thing a human can learn is what they believe about God. Why do you think God has stepped into our world to communicate to us what He is like and what His thoughts about us are? What about the times when God has spoken—at the Red Sea? in the fire from Mount Carmel? through David and Goliath? during Gideon’s miraculous victory? with Daniel in the lions’ den? at the feeding of the 5,000? the healing of the leper? the calming of the sea? What about Calvary?
- » God has spoken to you through His Word, and although everything has not been explained, you have enough information to say yes to God. God has more than said yes to you. He has endured centuries of people’s misunderstanding Him just for your love and friendship.

Friday
APPLYING

- » Read Romans 7:21-25.

- » The internal war for your loyalty to God is like having two lions living inside you—the lion of good and the lion of evil. Here’s a challenge. Pick three things you want to do to feed the good lion (things that feed and strengthen your connection to God). Also, consider what you normally feed the bad lion (things that draw you away from God and others) and choose to starve it this week. See how things go, and then reflect on the week and the way it has affected your awareness of the war between God and Satan and the role you play in that battle zone.



» What am I going to do to feed the good lion?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



» What am I going to do to starve the bad lion?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

ILLUSTRATIONS: TERRY CREWS

