

Paul and the Rebellion (War Against God)



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 3:12–17; 1 Corinthians 12:14–26; Ephesians 6:11–17; 1 Corinthians 15:12–18.

MEMORY VERSE: “What does not last will be dressed with what lasts forever. What dies will be dressed with what does not die. Then what is written will come true. It says, ‘Death has been swallowed up. It has lost the battle’ ” (1 Corinthians 15:54, NIV).

PAUL'S WRITINGS ARE FILLED WITH THE GREAT CONTROVERSY (WAR BETWEEN CHRIST AND SATAN) THEME. There is no question that Paul believed that Satan is real and his work of tricking people and causing death is real, too.

But anyone who has read Paul knows that the apostle's (teacher's and leader's) focus has always been on Christ and His final victory for us. Satan succeeded in overcoming God's covenant (agreement between God and His people) through the centuries. But the devil fully failed against Jesus. In Jesus, all the covenant promises have been fulfilled. This makes salvation sure for all, Jew and Gentile (non-Jew), who claim it in faith and obedience. Christ's faithfulness also promises that there will be an end to Satan (Hebrews 2:14) and an end to the great controversy.

This week we will study some of the symbols and metaphors (word-pictures) that Paul used to explain how real the great controversy is and how we are to live. We are to work together as a church and a community (group) of believers for the good of the whole in this war against evil.

ADAM AND JESUS (Romans 5:12–21)

Paul is known for his clear explanation of the gospel. But his explanation of the great controversy is also important. In the midst of teaching the good news, Paul lists his main points: (1) we have been “justified [forgiven; made righteous; holy] by faith” through Jesus (Romans 5:1); (2) we can reach God directly, and we “rejoice in hope” (Romans 5:2); (3) troubles and suffering no longer worry us (Romans 5:3–5). Paul gives us the promise that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8) and that we are now saved by Christ’s life and death for our sake. We are also saved from God’s last judgment against sin (Romans 5:9, 10).

Read Romans 5:12–21. How is the great controversy shown in these verses?



Adam brought death to all because of what he did in the Garden.

After talking about all that Christ has done for us, Paul explains *how* Jesus restored us to Himself. If the damage caused by Adam at the tree in the Garden was not fixed, there would be no hope of an eternal future. Then Satan would be victorious in the great controversy. Adam brought death to all because of what he did (Romans 5:12). Even the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai could not stop death and the sin problem. The law only made clearer what sin is. It was not the answer to sin. The problem of sin and death could be solved only through the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus paid the debt through the “gracious [kind; unselfish] gift” of His own life (Romans 5:15, 16, NLT).

Now all people could be restored. Death had “ruled” over us because of Adam’s sin. But now “abundance [plenty] of grace [forgiveness; mercy]” and “the gift of righteousness [holiness]” could rule because of Jesus’ faithfulness (Romans 5:17). It is not fair that we lost heaven because of Adam. We had no part in his wrong choice. But we suffer the results of it. Also, it is not fair that we regain heaven. We had nothing to do with what Jesus did 2,000 years ago. Paul closes his argument in Romans 5:18–21. The first Adam brought curse, punishment, and death. But the Second Adam (Jesus) brought restoration (newness of life).

“God demonstrates [shows] His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, NKJV). Put your own name in there and claim that promise for yourself. What hope does that give you?

THE CHURCH “BUILDING” (1 Corinthians 3:4–9)

“The church of Christ, weak and faulty as it may be, is the only thing on earth on which He gives His greatest love.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, page 284.

Nowhere is this classic Ellen G. White statement better explained than in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul compares¹ the church to a crop that different people work on. One person plants the seed, another waters it, but God Himself is responsible for its growth and maturity (1 Corinthians 3:4–9).

Paul continues his point, now by describing the church as a building. Someone sets the foundation, and then many different people build upon it (1 Corinthians 3:10). The foundation is none other than Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11). So those who follow must be careful about what kind of material they use. The coming judgment will show the difference between poor and good “building materials” (1 Corinthians 3:12–15).

Read 1 Corinthians 3:12–15. Compare these verses to Matthew 7:24–27. What are the two things that show whose side in the great controversy we really are on?

Now read what follows: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple” (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17, ESV).

We need to notice two things. The first is that the chapter is speaking about the church and how it is built up. It is not talking about health. God does not destroy people who abuse their bodies with bad lifestyle choices. They destroy themselves.

The second thing is that each time the word *you* is brought up in these two verses, it means many people in the Greek. A group, not a person, is being written to. So, if anyone does anything to destroy the church, he or she is in serious trouble. God warns that He will destroy the person who tries to destroy the church.

How can we be certain that, in all that we say and do, we are building up, not tearing down, the church?



One person plants the seed of the gospel, another waters it, but God makes it grow.

DEFINITIONS

1. compares—shows how two or more things are the same or different.

THE CHURCH AS A BODY (GROUP)
(1 Corinthians 12:14–16)

Read 1 Corinthians 12:14–26. What is the important message of these verses?



What would happen if a foot or an ear said it was not part of the body?

Paul speaks in a seemingly teasing way. He wonders what would happen if a foot or an ear said it was not part of the body. Paul goes further by wondering what would happen if the whole body were an eye or an ear (1 Corinthians 12:17). Imagine a big ear flapping its way across the room to say “Hello” to us! As foolish as that may sound, it does in fact happen when one group of people tries to control the church as if it were the sole owner.

Earlier, Paul outlines different activities in the church. He describes each activity as a gift of the Holy Spirit. There are those members who speak with wisdom and others who are very knowledgeable about the Bible (1 Corinthians 12:8). There are those whose faith is an inspiration to all. There are those with a healing touch (1 Corinthians 12:9). There are miracle workers. There are people with the ability to prophesy (tell what will happen in the future). There are those believers who can clearly tell the difference between good and evil. And there are those who can understand other languages (1 Corinthians 12:10). Note that the people themselves do not decide their own abilities. Instead, the Holy Spirit has handpicked each of them from different backgrounds to build up and bring unity (oneness) to the body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:11–13). To point out this important fact, Paul repeats himself: God is the one who decides where each member fits (1 Corinthians 12:18).

Most important, there are many members but only one body. Each member is connected with all of the others, even those who do not consider themselves worth much (1 Corinthians 12:20–24). This cooperation has built-in protections to ensure the safety and well-being of each. Cooperation happens in the church when hurts and rejoicing are shared (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Some bodies struggle with autoimmune (when the body attacks itself) diseases. These diseases can be harmful and destructive, sometimes fatal. Considering the verses for today, how does the enemy work to undermine the body? And how can we be used by the Lord to help stop this attack?

THE ARMOR OF GOD (Ephesians 6:11–17)

Read Ephesians 6:11–17. What do these verses tell us about how real, and personal, the great controversy is?

It is not what the different pieces of armor are all about that is important. Instead, what they represent is important. Paul points out that we need to take *all of the armor*, not just chosen pieces of it. In so doing, we will remain standing (Ephesians 6:13). This is a metaphor (word-picture) used in the Bible to describe our being innocent in judgment (compare with Psalm 1:5). In other words, we will be victorious.

What holds all the armor in place is the belt, used as a metaphor (example; word picture) for the truth (Ephesians 6:14). So, the truth is what holds all our spiritual defenses in place. Jesus often talked about truth (John 1:14, 17; John 4:24; John 8:32; John 14:6). The breastplate of righteousness (God's holiness) is mentioned next (Ephesians 6:14); "righteousness" is another key word in Jesus' sermons (for example, Matthew 5:6, 10; Matthew 6:33). In the Old Testament, righteousness was understood as making sure there was justice in the land and ensuring that everyone was treated fairly.

The military sandals (shoes; Ephesians 6:15) represent the gospel of peace. The wording was borrowed from Isaiah 52:7. This verse speaks about people walking long distances to let their countrymen in slavery know that Jerusalem had been rebuilt and that God had restored (returned; made new; brought back) the freedom of His people. It is another way of explaining that part of fighting against evil is to let people know that God has won the battle already and that they can now live at peace with themselves, with others, and with God.

The shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16) prevents "fiery arrows" (NLT) from hitting their target and causing full destruction. The helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17) is compared to the crown Jesus shares with us (Revelation 1:6; Revelation 2:10). The sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) is our only weapon of self-defense, to be used as Jesus did when tempted (caused to feel a desire to sin) by the devil (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).

What does the full armor tell us about our total dependence upon God in the great controversy? How can we make sure that we are leaving no part of ourselves unprotected?



To be victorious, we must put on all the armor of God, not just pieces of it.

THE LAST ENEMY (1 Corinthians 15:12–18)

Clearly some people in the church at Corinth were confused about the resurrection (return to life from the dead). It seems there is some concern about the believers who have died (1 Corinthians 15:6). Some people are suggesting that those who have died would miss out on Jesus' return (1 Corinthians 15:12).

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–18. What does denying the resurrection of the dead mean?

Paul closes his argument by asking, “Do we have hope in Christ only for this life?” But he quickly answers, “Then people should pity us more than anyone else” (1 Corinthians 15:19, NIV). He also adds, “But Christ really has been raised from the dead. He is the first of all those who will rise” (1 Corinthians 15:20, NIV).

Then Paul compares Christ with Adam: “Because of Adam, all people die. So because of Christ, all will be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22, NIV). Paul also says when that general resurrection will be: “at His coming” (1 Corinthians 15:23, NKJV). Later in the chapter, he continues with the comparison of the two “Adams” (1 Corinthians 15:45–49). The first man was made from the dust. But the heavenly Man (Jesus) is from heaven, and so one day, He will change us. What this means is explained in a description of what happens at the Second Coming: “The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised to live forever. And we will be changed. Our natural bodies don't [do not] last forever. They must be dressed with what does last forever. What dies must be dressed with what does not die” (1 Corinthians 15:52, 53, NIV).

Adam was at first made to live forever. But then sin entered the world. And humans soon became worse and worse until each person would live only for a short time. If we are to receive eternal life, we will be made to live forever. And that is what we will be given.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:23–26. We are involved in the great controversy now. And death and evil and unholy forces seem to control the world. But what do these verses tell us about how the great controversy ends? How can we learn to trust beyond what we know so we can accept what these promises mean for each one of us?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Both man and the earth had by sin come under the control of Satan. And man was to be restored by the plan of salvation. At his creation, Adam was placed in control over the earth. But Adam gave in to temptation. So then Adam was brought under the power of Satan. And the control which Adam held passed to Satan. So, Satan became ‘the god of this world.’ He had stolen that control over the earth which had been given to Adam at first. But Christ’s sacrifice paid the penalty of sin. He also would save man. Christ also would gain back control over the world. All that was lost by the first Adam will be restored by the Second Adam [Jesus].” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, November 4, 1908. It is so easy, as we look around at the world, to forget the important truth that Satan is defeated and that his “ ‘time is short’ ” (Revelation 12:12, NIV). Evil, death, and suffering are all over this world, but we are promised that, because of what Christ has done, all these terrible things will be removed. Also, if it is not clear to us by now, it should be: these things will not be removed by anything we as humans do. God alone will bring the promised changes for us. We certainly cannot take care of the problems ourselves.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 “The church is weak and faulty and always needs to be warned and counseled. But it is always the center of Christ’s greatest love. He is making experiments of grace on human hearts, and is causing such changes of character that angels are amazed [surprised] and show their joy in songs of praise. The angels are joyful to think that sinful humans can be so changed.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, “The Signal of Advance,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 20, 1903. What are some of the ways that we are changed by what Jesus does for and in us?
- 2 How do we find the great controversy shown within the church at all levels? What are the issues being used to divide us, to weaken us, to keep us from doing what we have been called to do? How can we bring healing and unity (oneness) when people just do not agree on what we might believe are important points?