

PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD, Part 5: “A Tale of Two Pockets” (Outline)

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Welcome to the finale of our series, “Prepare to Meet Thy God.” This final message will be titled, “A Tale of Two Pockets.”

At one of the town hall meetings in New Hampshire prior to the 2016 presidential primary, a young man spoke of how a rabbi had once told him that life can be summarized by two pockets.

In one pocket you find a note which informs you that, “I am nothing but dust and ashes.” But in the other pocket a note tells you, “The universe is made for me.”

In truth, this balance—this tale of two pockets—lies at the heart of the Seventh-day Adventist Christian’s own self-awareness, especially in view of the believer’s role in the settling of the great controversy and the final vindication of God’s character.

All of us, as creatures of the infinite God of heaven, possess the insignificance of dust and ashes. Like Isaiah of old, we are forced to declare:

Isa. 6:5:

“Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”

Yet the eye of the universe rests on God’s striving, struggling saints, as they prepare to vanquish the full force of satanic allurements within the vortex of history’s closing drama. This is what the apostle Paul anticipated when he declares:

I Cor. 4:9:

“We are made a spectacle unto the world, to angels, and to men.”

Now the rabbi’s statement we quoted at the beginning may be a bit over the top. But Ellen White makes the following statement regarding our purpose in the divine plan:

ST April 22, 1903:

“We were brought into existence because we were needed. How sad the thought that if we stand on the wrong side, in the ranks of the enemy, we are lost to the design of our Creator.”

MS. 27, 1892:

“All heaven is represented to me as watching the unfolding of events. A crisis is to be revealed in the great and prolonged controversy in the government of God on earth. Something great and decisive is to take place, and that right early. If any delay, the character of God and His throne will be compromised.”

We're all familiar, I'm sure, with the first promise in the Bible of a coming Savior:

Gen. 3:15:

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel.”

But some perhaps are not aware of through whom Jesus will bruise the serpent's head. Jesus isn't going to do this all by Himself.

Rom. 16:20:

“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”

If Jesus had done all the bruising necessary at the cross, the above promise by the apostle Paul—which obviously came after the cross—wouldn't have been necessary. Ellen White echoes this New Testament promise in such statements as the following:

4T 594:

“The church will yet see troublous times. She will prophesy in sackcloth. But although she must meet heresies and persecutions, although she must battle with the infidel and the apostate, yet by the help of God she is bruising the head of Satan.”

TDWG 27:

“God help us to take heed to ourselves or we shall certainly lose heaven. Little departures from right, little indulgences, seem a trifling thing at present; but Satan will lead us on a track that will separate us from righteousness and from God. We want not our ways but God's ways. We want to strive with all the powers of being to bruise Satan under our feet and be sure that we are right with God, that we have a clear title to our immortal inheritance.”

The Great Controversy in Scripture

We're going to look at three Bible illustrations of what Seventh-day Adventists call the great controversy theme. There are those both inside and outside our denomination who are presently disputing this construct. But I hope everyone will be able to see, when we're finished, that it is thoroughly Biblical.

Ellen White is clear that throughout the controversy between Christ and Satan, the central issue has been whether or not God's law can in fact be obeyed:

DA 761:

“In the opening of the great controversy Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed.”

ST July 23, 1902:

“On this earth, Satan sought to carry forward the work that he began in heaven. He declared that man could not obey the law of God.”

After the fall of Adam, Satan insisted that his argument had been won:

DA 117:

“Satan had pointed to Adam’s sin as proof that God’s law was unjust, and could not be obeyed.”

1SM 252:

“After the fall of man, Satan declared that human beings were proved to be incapable of keeping the law of God, and he sought to carry the universe with him in this belief.”

Now for the past five decades in modern Adventism, there have been those who insist that Satan’s claim regarding obedience to God’s law concerned unfallen beings only. We’re still hearing this argument from certain individuals. One Ellen White statement that has been used to support this claim is the following:

1SM 253:

“Christ came to the earth, taking humanity and standing as man’s representative, to show in the controversy with Satan that man, as God created him, connected with the Father and the Son, could obey every divine requirement.”

Now what is being alleged is that the key phrase in this statement is, “as God created him.” But when we study the Ellen White consensus, it becomes clear that the key phrase in this statement is, “connected with the Father and the Son.” This connection, according to the writings of Ellen White, is restored by the experience of conversion and sanctification:

4T 339:

“When connected with God, and sincerely seeking His approval, man becomes elevated, ennobled, and sanctified.”

MH 180-181:

“The Saviour took upon Himself the infirmities of humanity and lived a sinless life, that men might have no fear that because of the weakness of human nature they could not overcome. Christ came to make us ‘partakers of the divine nature,’ and His life declares that humanity, combined with divinity, does not commit sin.

“The Saviour overcame to show man how he may overcome.”

OHC 138:

“The law of God given from Sinai is a copy of the mind and will of the Infinite God. It is sacredly revered by the holy angels. Obedience to its requirements will perfect Christian character, and restore man, through Christ, to his condition before the fall.”

While Ellen White is clear that Jesus did prove that the unfallen Adam need not have sinned, He also came to prove that you and I need not sin either:

DA 24:

“Satan represents God’s law of love as a law of selfishness. He declares that it is impossible for us to obey its precepts.... His (Christ’s) life testifies that it is possible for us also to obey the law of God.”

ST Jan. 16, 1896:

“Satan declared that it was impossible for the sons and daughters of Adam to keep the law of God, and thus charged upon God a lack of wisdom and love. If they could not keep the law, then there was fault with the Lawgiver. Men who are under the control of Satan repeat these accusations against God, in asserting that men cannot keep the law of God.”

1SM 226:

“By living a sinless life He (Christ) testified that every son and daughter of Adam can resist the temptations of the one who first brought sin into the world. Christ brought men and women power to overcome. He came to this world in human form, to live a man amongst men. He assumed the liabilities of human nature, to be proved and tried.”

7BC 929:

“The Lord now demands that every son and daughter of Adam, through faith in Jesus Christ, serve Him in human nature which we now have. The Lord Jesus has bridged the gulf that sin has made. He has connected earth with heaven, and finite man with the infinite God. Jesus, the world’s Redeemer, could only keep the commandments of God in the same way that humanity can keep them.”

MH 25:

“Christ came to this world to show that by receiving power from on high, man can live an unsullied life.”

DA 664:

“Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was.”

MB 49:

“By His own obedience to the law, Christ testified to its immutable character and proved that through His grace it could be perfectly obeyed by every son and daughter of Adam.”

KH 292:

“Some who claim to believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour have said, ‘No one can keep the law.’ On this point the words of Christ are decisive. He states, ‘I have kept My Father’s commandments.’ And He is our example in all things.”

Where we all agree.

Both sides in the present controversy agree that Christ defeated Satan at the cross. Ellen White is clear about this:

DA 762:

“By His life and His death, Christ proved that God’s justice did not destroy His mercy, but that sin could be forgiven, and that the law is righteous, and can be perfectly obeyed. Satan’s charges were refuted.”

RH Sept. 24, 1091:

“Satan declared that human beings could not keep the law. Christ has proved this statement false.”

So why, then, was Satan not destroyed at the cross? Ellen White tells us:

DA 761:

“Yet Satan was not then destroyed. The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. 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.”

Now what is most significant about this statement is that it tells us that issues remain to be settled for angels as well as humans. There are those who would have us believe that the cosmic vindication of God’s character was all done at the cross, and that the only vindication of God’s character that remains for human beings to accomplish is strictly missional in nature.

But if that were true, why do the angels still need to be convinced of certain issues in the great controversy? Ellen White is clear that Satan’s charge regarding the alleged impossibility of obedience to the divine law is still operative in the controversy with evil:

DA 309:

“All who break God’s commandments are sustaining Satan’s claim that the law is unjust, and cannot be obeyed.”

ST July 10, 1901:

“Those who live the life of a Christian are battling against the devil’s lie that man cannot keep God’s law.”

1MR 369:

“Exact obedience is required, and those who say that it is not possible to live a perfect life, throw upon God the imputation of injustice and untruth.”

GC 489:

“Therefore he (Satan) is constantly seeking to deceive the followers of Christ with his fatal sophistry that it is impossible for them to overcome.”

Whether we like it or not, the present controversy in Adventism compels us to decide whether we will ultimately stand with God, or with Satan, in the titanic struggle still in progress.

Another statement is clear that the work of refuting Satan's lies about God's requirements is not the work of Christ alone, but of both Christ and all His followers:

Ed 154:

“Unselfishness, the principle of God's kingdom, is the principle that Satan hates; its very existence he denies. From the beginning of the great controversy he has endeavored to prove God's principles of action to be selfish, and he deals in the same way with all who serve God. To disprove Satan's claim is the work of Christ and of all who bear His name.”

No Competition With Christ or Calvary

Now there are those who insist that what I am teaching here today, and throughout this seminar, places Christians in competition with Christ and His cross.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Jesus said, as we all know:

John 8:12:

“I am the light of the world.”

But Jesus also said, regarding His followers, in His Sermon on the Mount:

Matt. 5:14:

“Ye are the light of the world. . . .

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

In Ellen White's words:

MB 40:

“While our Saviour is the great source of illumination, forget not, O Christian, that He is revealed through humanity.”

Too many forget that it is through the benefits of Calvary that we receive the grace that sanctifies as well as the grace that justifies. Too many seem to believe that the cross is all about justification. I don't know where people get this theory, but it's not in the Bible.

Yes, the blood of Jesus is the instrument of our forgiveness:

Eph. 1:7:

“In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

But that blood is also the means whereby we are sanctified! Look at what we find in the book of Hebrews:

Heb. 13:12,20-21:

“Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. . . .

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

“Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

God's Glory Revealed in Us

Folks, the Bible is clear that God Himself is on trial in His dealings with humanity, and in the conduct of His people:

Rom. 3:4:

“God forbid; yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That Thou mightest be justified in Thy sayings, and mightest overcome when Thou art judged.”

Certainly we all know the opening words of the first angel's message:

Rev. 14:7:

“Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come.”

Now, how are we to do this? What, according to the Bible, is God's glory?

Ex. 33:18-19:

“And [Moses] said, I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory.

“And [God] said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee.”

Ex. 34:6-7:

“And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,

“Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will be no means clear the guilty.”

According to the Bible, this glory is to be demonstrated through His people:

Isa. 60:1-2:

“Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

“For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee.”

Eph. 3:20-21:

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that ye ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.

“Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end, Amen.”

The Bible says this was why humanity was created in the first place:

Isa. 43:6-7:

“I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth;

“Even every one that is called by My name; for I have created him for My glory.”

Remember the Ellen White statement we saw earlier:

ST April 22, 1903:

“We were brought into existence because we were needed.”

We saw earlier how God will bruise Satan under the feet of His saints:

Rom. 16:20:

“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”

Elsewhere the Bible is clear that God will vindicate His holy name through the cleansing of His people from sin:

Eze. 36:21-23:

“I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel caused to be profaned....

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

“And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations will know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I vindicate My holiness before their eyes” (RSV).

And how will God, through His people, accomplish this vindication of His holy name?

Eze. 36:25-27:

“You shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

“A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

“And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to observe My ordinances” (RSV).

It is safe to say this vindication never happened in the experience of God's ancient people, else the plan of salvation would have turned out much differently. This prophecy, therefore, remains to be fulfilled, in the experience of final victory by the Last Generation saints.

Interestingly, Jesus Himself declared that His followers would do greater things than He:

John 14:12:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall He do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto My Father.”

It would be hard to imagine anyone performing greater miracles than those done by Jesus, and certainly not exceeding the magnitude of sacrifice or suffering which He experienced. But the totality of inspired evidence is clear, as we will see, that God's people—by His grace—will produce a demonstration of righteousness which will bring to an actual close the controversy whose victorious climax Jesus made certain.

In this sense, we can see how Jesus' followers will do greater works than He. The whole world, after all, did not witness the works of Christ while He was on earth.

But the whole world will in fact witness the glory of God as revealed through His final generation. The Bible affirms this with such predictions as the following:

Isa. 40:5:

“And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

And we saw earlier, from the same author, through whom this glory will be revealed:

Isa. 60:1-2:

“Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.
“For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee.”

And the New Testament echoes this promise:

Rom. 8:18-19:

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.”

Ellen White on the Vindication of God

PP 68:

“But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe.”

DA 763:

“The warfare against God’s law, which was begun in heaven, will be continued until the end of time. Every man will be tested. Obedience or disobedience is the question to be decided by the whole world. All will be called to choose between the law of God and the laws of men. Here the dividing line will be drawn. There will be but two classes. Every character will be fully developed, and all will show whether they have chosen the side of loyalty or that of rebellion.

“Then the end will come. God will vindicate His law and deliver His people.”

We spoke earlier about the experience of Job. Listen to how Ellen White says Job vindicated God’s character:

Ed 156:

“According to his faith, so it was unto Job. ‘When He hath tried me,’ he said, ‘I shall come forth as gold.’ Job 23:10. So it came to pass. By his patient endurance he vindicated his own character, and thus the character of Him whose representative he was.”

Now God waits for vindication through His end-time church:

5T 746:

“If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called to be the depositaries of His holy law, and to vindicate His character before the world.”

RH Aug. 25, 1885:

“God will have a people upon the earth who will vindicate His honor by having respect to all of His commandments.... Not one of us can afford to dishonor God by living in transgression of His law.”

Christian Educator, Oct. 1, 1898:

“His heart of sympathy goes out to all earth’s sufferers, and with every one who works for their relief, He co-operates. As with His blessing health returns, the character of God will be vindicated, and the lie thrown back upon Satan, its originator.”

DA 671:

“The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.”

ST Nov. 25, 1897:

“The cold heart is to be quickened and glow with divine love. It is to beat in unison with the heart of the Redeemer. The honor of Christ must stand complete in the perfection of the character of His chosen people. He desires that they shall represent His character to the world.”

Now we spoke earlier of those who think the only vindication God still needs from His people is strictly missional—that the cosmic vindication of God was totally finished at the cross. But let’s look again at why Ellen White says Satan wasn’t destroyed at Calvary:

DA 761:

“The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. 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.”

The following Ellen White statement is clear that the vindication of God through His people at the close of time is for the benefit of *both* the fallen world *and* the unfallen universe—a task, in other words, both missional and cosmic:

YRP 338:

“New territory is to be added to God’s kingdom. New tracts of moral vineyard are to be cultivated as the garden of the Lord. The honor of the law of God is to be vindicated before the unfallen worlds, before the heavenly universe, and before the fallen world. The bitterest persecution will come, but when Zion arises, and puts on her beautiful garments, she will shine forth in the beauty of holiness.”

Conclusion

Finally, let us again review these powerful inspired assurances:

TM 18-19:

“The church, being endowed with the righteousness of Christ, is His depository, in which the wealth of His mercy, His love, His grace, is to appear in full and final display. . . . The gift of His Holy Spirit, rich, full, and abundant, is to be to His church as an encompassing wall of fire, which the powers of hell shall not prevail against. In their untainted purity and spotless perfection, Christ looks upon His people as the reward of all His suffering, His humiliation, and His love, and the supplement of His glory.”

There are those who insist that the victory of Christ at the cross was so complete that it “need not be supplemented.” But we read a statement like this one, we’re forced to decide:

Do we believe certain scholars, sincere though they may be?
Or do we believe the written counsel of God?

And again, on the subject of sinlessness:

RH April 1, 1902:

“The Saviour is wounded afresh and put to open shame when His people pay no heed to His word. He came to this world and lived a sinless life, that in His power His people might also

live lives of sinlessness. He desires them by practicing the principles of truth to show to the world that God's grace has power to sanctify the heart."

COL 415-416:

"The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.

"The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works—in words of truth and deeds of holiness."

President John F. Kennedy once said,

"We have the power to make this the best generation of mankind in the history of the world, or to make it the last."

"Through the grace of God and [our] own diligent effort" (GC 425), we have the chance to be both!