

The Last Great Deception

As you read the gospels, it becomes quite clear that Jesus didn't yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do. Many times the unbelieving Jews tried to kill Him, but they were unsuccessful, because it just wasn't time. But when His work was completed, with His last parting breath He cried out, "It is finished." The battle between good and evil had been won, and can you imagine the joy among the angels and unfallen worlds who had been watching the goings on in this sin cursed earth for so long? They must have been ecstatic, because all heaven triumphed in Jesus' victory, not just this world. Satan finally, once and for all, was defeated, and he knew that his kingdom was lost. That's what we're told in **Revelation 12:10**. Let's take a quick look at it before we move on. Notice what the apostle John says, "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God (**how often?**) day and night."

Oh friends, the devil never sleeps, and we need to be conscious of that. He's always looking for a weak moment to stick in the dagger and destroy our connection with Christ if he can. So we need to be vigilant, because we know our adversary will take advantage of every single opportunity he can to cause us to be lost. He knows that hurting us hurts the One who gave His life to redeem us. Besides, if we're lost he won't have to suffer for our sins, we will. And so he has his reasons to wreak as much havoc as he can while he can.

When Jesus bowed His head and died, the last tie of sympathy between fallen and unfallen angels and unfallen worlds was broken. Satan's disguise was torn away, and from that point forward his work was restricted among the heavenly host, but unfortunately for us, not restricted down here on earth. This earth is now the only battleground left, and the battle is for our souls. It's not a physical battle, although spiritual battles can sometimes turn physical when you're dealing with people who are controlled from beneath, but by and large it's all a mind game. In ***Steps to Christ, page 43*** it says, "The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness."

And so, it took the death of Christ to clearly reveal Satan's true character to the holy angels and to worlds unfallen, because the devil had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings did not fully understand his principles and the nature of his rebellion at first, and it took some time to expose him for what he really was, a liar and a murderer. We don't know how long it took from the creation of the angels until the crucifixion, but we do

know it has taken a little over 6000 years so far to expose him to sinful human beings, and we still don't fully understand how deceptive he can be. But we can be thankful this morning that we are getting closer and closer to the time when Jesus will come to put an end to the great controversy, and I'm so looking forward to that time, aren't you? It's easy to get caught up in the cares of this life, isn't it? But we need to connect with Christ every day instead, and if we do, He'll see to it that we will develop a character that will be ready for translation when He comes.

We need to understand, brothers and sister, that Lucifer was a being of tremendous power and glory that had set himself against God, and there wasn't another created being that could hold a candle to him. At this point he's not what he used to be, but in his fallen condition he's still a very powerful being who can't be defeated by human power alone. Notice what it says about him in **Ezekiel 28:12-15**: "Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the Sardis, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created, **(which made him quite the choir director, don't you think?)** Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee." By the way, iniquity is the worst kind of sin, because by definition it means willful rebellion and not just trying to obey but missing the mark as is indicated by the word sin.

As the covering cherub it meant that he stood in the light of God's immediate presence. He was the first and highest of all created beings and had been foremost in revealing God's purposes to the whole universe. And so, after he had sinned, his power to deceive became super deceptive, which made the exposing of his true character even more difficult, and that deceptive power has grown tremendously over the past 6000 years as he's had opportunity to fine tune it. And think about this. The better one knows an individual, the better they can more effectively use that knowledge to twist that person's statements and misrepresent their character? And who knows this better than the first and highest of all created beings when it comes to God's character? And this truth carries over to the time that's just before us when it comes to the final event in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. That's why we're told in ***The Great Controversy, page 608*** that our former brethren will be the most effective agents of Satan to misrepresent and accuse us over the Sabbath/Sunday issue when that time comes.

I want to put two Spirit of Prophecy quotes together for you that will help us understand that the devil cannot overcome us if we avail ourselves of the power of the Holy Spirit that has been promised to us. The first one is in *Signs of the Times, September 29, 1887*.

“A cunning and cruel foe attends our steps, and is working every moment, with all his strength and skill, to turn us from the right way. Ever since he succeeded in overcoming our first parents in their beautiful Eden home, he has been engaged in this work. More than six thousand years of continual practice has greatly increased his skill to deceive and allure. . . . Thus while the power of the human race to resist temptation is continually decreasing, Satan’s skill and power to tempt are continually increasing. This is one great reason why the temptations of the last days will be more severe than those of any other age.”

So, because temptations in these last days are more severe than at any other time in this earth’s history, it would seem that we need more Holy Spirit power to resist than at any other time, wouldn’t you say? That’s the logical conclusion one must come to, and I think that’s the reason for this next quote from *Spaulding and Megan, page 4* where our prophet says, “You are getting the coming of the Lord too far off. I saw the latter rain was coming as [suddenly as] the midnight cry, and with ten times the power.”

Interesting to think about, isn’t it? If you’re familiar with the history of the Advent movement, you know that the Holy Spirit was mightily involved in the lives of many of the pioneers of our faith, but the latter rain being ten times the power of the mid-night cry is really saying something, is it not? And here’s another thought. If we think that kind of power is only for some future time, I think we are getting the coming of the Lord too far off as well. Over a hundred years ago the prophet told us the latter rain was available back then and began to be poured out, so why are we still having difficulty overcoming sin if ten times the power is available?

The one thing I get out of these statements is that there’s plenty of power for us to have victory over every besetting sin that may be plaguing us now, and that we can and should take advantage of it now. In **Acts 5:32** we’re told that the Holy Spirit is given to those that obey God. So if we want the power we just read about, we must obey what we already know. Does that make sense? It’s really as simple as that, but people try to make this truth complicated or unavailable till some future time. Read *Testimonies to Ministers* beginning at about **page 507** and see what conclusion you come to about the latter rain. Also you might want to go to my website and on the sermons page click on the YouTube video titled “Who Receives The Latter Rain.” I think you might find it enlightening.

God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can step on a bug; but He didn't do it, why? Because rebellion was not to be overcome by force. Force is found only under Satan's government. That's why Sabbath keepers are going to be persecuted in the near future. Force is not a part of the Lord's principles. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love. These are the principles He uses, and the same principles we are to use to win souls to Christ. God's government is moral, and truth and love are supposed to be the prevailing power, and that's the way it should be in our families as well.

It was God's original purpose to make heaven an eternally secure place, and in the councils of heaven it was decided that time had to be given for Satan to develop the principles which were the foundation of his system of government. His claim was that his principles were superior to God's principles. And so, ample time had to be given for the working out of Satan's principles that they might be seen and willingly rejected by the entire universe.

It was in the Garden that Satan led our first parents into sin, and it was then that the plan of redemption was put in operation. Up until the time when Jesus came upon the scene and took humanity, four thousand years had gone by since the fall, and all that time Christ was working for the benefit of mankind while Satan was working for our ruin, and the unfallen worlds beheld it all.

When Jesus came into the world, guess what? All of Satan's power was turned against Him. From the time when He appeared as a babe in Bethlehem, the devil did everything he could to cause Him to sin and disrupt the plan of salvation. In every possible way he tried to prevent Jesus from developing a perfect childhood, a faultless manhood, a holy ministry, and an unblemished sacrifice, but he was defeated at every turn. He could not and did not lead Jesus into sin, neither could he discourage Him or drive Him from the work He came to this earth to do, and aren't you thankful for that? And besides that, He's our example to live as He lived.

During His whole life the storm of Satan's wrath beat upon Jesus, but the more mercilessly it fell, the more firmly Jesus clung to the hand of His Father and pressed on in the bloodstained path, and all the efforts of Satan to oppress and overcome Him only brought out in a purer light His spotless character, and this is the way it's got to be with us, brothers and sisters. We need to be like the rose. The more it's crushed the more fragrant the smell.

All heaven and all the unfallen worlds had witnessed the struggle between good and evil, and you can bet they watched with intense interest, especially as they followed the closing scenes of the conflict. They saw Jesus enter the garden of Gethsemane and saw Him bowed down with the horror of a great darkness. They heard His bitter cry, "Father, if it be

possible, let this cup pass from Me.” And as the Father’s presence was withdrawn, they saw the bloody sweat that fell in drops upon the ground. Three times Jesus prayed for deliverance until holy angels could no longer endure the sight until one of them was sent to comfort the Son of God, because sleepy human beings were too careless and unaware of what was going on.

Then afterward heaven continued watching as Jesus was betrayed into the hands of the murderous mob, and with mockery and violence hurried from one courtroom scene to another. They heard the sneers of His persecutors as they accused Him of having an illegitimate birth, which of course was not true. They heard with cursing and swearing the denial by one of His best-loved disciples. Oh, friends, think of it. They saw the Saviour seized at midnight in Gethsemane, dragged here and there and from the palace to the judgment hall as He was arraigned twice before the priests, twice before the Sanhedrin, twice before Pilate, and once before Herod who had Him mocked, scourged, condemned, and led out to be crucified, bearing the heavy burden of the cross as the town rabble yelled their profanities.

You know, we’ve been told it would be well to spend a thoughtful hour each day reviewing the life of Christ from the manger to Calvary. That we should take it point by point and let the imagination vividly grasp each scene, especially the closing ones of His earthly life.

Heaven viewed it all with grief and amazement as Christ hung upon the cross, blood flowing from His wounded temples, and the bloody sweat standing upon His brow. From His hands and feet the blood fell, drop by drop upon the rock that had been drilled for the cross. They saw the gaping wounds made by the nails as the weight of His body dragged upon His hands. They saw His labored breath grow quick and deep as His soul panted under the burden of the sins of the world, and after all this abuse holy beings were filled with wonder when the prayer of Christ was offered in the midst of His terrible suffering, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Friends, do we know what we do when we think it a hard thing to give up our cherished sins? Had we been there, in what group would we have been found? Would we have been sleeping in the Garden? Would we have been like Peter who denied His master with foul language as he tried to throw people off as being one of His disciples? I think this is one of the reasons we’ve been told to spend that thoughtful hour, don’t you?

Even though Jesus sacrificed everything for the human race, and I mean everything, yet there stood men, formed in the image of God, joining with Satan to crush out the life of a Savior who came to redeem them from the curse of sin and to give them a chance to live forever. What a sight for holy beings to witness.

Remember what it says in **Ephesians 6:12**? “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” These are the principalities and powers of darkness that were assembled all around the cross, casting the hellish shadow of unbelief into the hearts of men. When God created these holy beings turned wicked, they were beautiful and glorious, just like everything else He made, but now they were totally and completely unrecognizable from what they once were.

Satanic agencies together with evil men were doing their best to cause people to believe that Christ was the worst sinner in the world and to make Him the object of the worst kind of hatred, but really they gained nothing in the redemption of mankind by it all. If just one sin could have been found in Christ, had He in one particular yielded to Satan to escape the cross, Satan would have triumphed. When Christ bowed His head and died victorious, is when **Revelation 12:10** came into play, which we already read, but I’ll read it again. John said, “And I heard a loud voice saying (**where?**) In heaven, now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.”

This is when Satan’s disguise was torn away once and for all and when the problem with his proposed form of government was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had finally revealed himself as the murderer he was. By shedding Christ’s blood he had totally uprooted himself from the sympathies of holy beings, and ever afterward his work would be restricted, we’re told. He could no longer accost the angels as they came from the heavenly courts to be the accuser of the brethren. They were done with him. The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken, and that’s the way it needs to be with us and the sins that so easily beset us. The power is available for us to be done with sin, and we will be when we see Jesus for who He is, the One who has all power in heaven and earth, even while Satan is still able to work with all power and signs and lying wonders and with all deceivableness and unrighteousness in them that perish.

But, just because all sympathy was finally broken with the angels and unfallen worlds, it doesn’t mean God could now destroy Satan and his agents. Even though their sympathies were broken, still the holy angels did not yet fully understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake had to be more fully revealed, and for the sake of them and us, Satan’s existence must be allowed to continue on a little longer. Mankind especially must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness, and he must choose to serve one or the other. That’s why the great controversy has gone

on for so long. We must make choices that will develop in us a righteous character that Jesus can take to heaven so sin will not arise the second time.

When the great controversy began in heaven, Satan's claim was that the law of God couldn't be obeyed, that justice and mercy were at swords point, and that if the law should be broken, which he had already done by the way, then it would be absolutely impossible for the one who sinned to be forgiven. His claim was that every sin must be punished, and if God forgave the sin, He wouldn't be a God of truth and justice. So when Adam and Eve broke the law of God, Satan was very happy. Why? Because he had something up his sleeve; he had a plan that he thought would save his own skin; something that would allow him back into heaven and reclaim his lost position. He figured if God could forgive the sin of Adam and Eve, then for God to be just, He would also have to forgive him.

So, when our first parents disobeyed, he said it proved that God's law could not be obeyed and man could not be forgiven. Because he had been banished from heaven, he claimed that the human race must be forever shut out from God's presence as well. God could not be just, he urged, and yet show mercy to the sinner. Listen, Satan knew full well that God was merciful and would try to make a way so that human beings could be pardoned, and if that should happen, he figured that he would have to be pardoned as well.

But here's something Satan didn't figure on. Yes, man had sinned, but having sinned, they were in a much different position from that of Satan. Lucifer, when in heaven, knew exactly what he was doing and he went ahead and did it anyway. He sinned in the light of God's glory. To him, as to no other created being, was given a revelation of God's love. He fully understood the character of God, he knew of His goodness, and despite that, he chose to follow his own selfish, independent will, and unfortunately for him, this choice was final. There was no more that God could do to save him. But it was different with man, he was deceived. The height and depth and breadth of the love of God he didn't know. And so, for him there was hope. By beholding God's character there was opportunity that he might be drawn back to God.

Now here's where it gets serious for us, because once we truly know God and His character, and His love, and His pardoning grace, and then purposely and knowingly turn our backs on Him and choose to follow our own selfish, independent will like Lucifer did, then that may very well be our final decision as well. Only God knows when that time comes for each individual and I'm thankful He hasn't given you and me the responsibility of determining when that time arrives for someone, or when that full knowledge is received and known in the soul, but I can assure you that it's a very dangerous thing to sin knowingly, because it will lead to the unpardonable sin if persisted in, and when that point is reached, and it may

be different for everyone, it's a final and irrevocable decision that will never ever change, and that's a scary thought, but one we need to consider very seriously.

Do you know why some people can't seem to get the victory over sin? It's because they don't love God the way they should. This may seem like a simplistic answer, but it's true. The apostle Paul said, "The love of God constrains **(or compels)** us." It's the love of God that keeps us from sin, or gives us the desire to obey because of the love that was shed upon us through the sacrifice of Christ. Why do you think we're told to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ, especially the closing scenes? It's so we will so fall in love with Jesus that we would never want to do anything to hurt Him, and when we sin it hurts Him, don't you see? There's a direct correlation to not spending the time in God's word every day and not being able to stop sinning. God loves you, and He wants you to spend eternity with Him, but if you choose not to, then His justice must kick in.

Through Jesus God's mercy was made known to the human race, but mercy does not set aside justice. The law shows us what God's character is like, and **Matthew 5:17** tells us not a jot or tittle of it could be changed to meet man in his fallen condition. And so, God did not change His law, but He sacrificed Himself in Christ for man's redemption. **2 Corinthians 5:19** says, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."

Listen to how ***The Desire of Ages, page 762*** explains this: "The law requires righteousness, a righteous life, a perfect character; and this man has not to give. He cannot meet the claims of God's holy law. But Christ, coming to the earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character. **(Now here's the good part)** These He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. His life stands for the life of men. Thus they have remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. More than this, **(that is, more than forgiveness of sin)** Christ imbues **(permeates or saturates)** men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. Thus the very righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ. God can 'be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.' **Romans 3:26.**"

And so, Satan's claim that God could not justify the sinner is a false claim, isn't it? True for him, because he had gone too far, but not for mankind, unless mankind goes too far. If we love Jesus as it is our privilege to love Him, we will not continue to hurt Him by sinning. It's just that simple.

So you see friends, God's love has been expressed in His justice no less than in His mercy. Justice is the foundation of His throne and it was Satan's purpose to divorce mercy from justice. But Christ shows that in God's plan they cannot be annulled, but are permanently joined together; the one cannot exist without the other. That's why **Psalm 85:10** says, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

By His life and death, Christ proved several things. Firstly, that God's justice did not destroy His mercy. Secondly that sin could be forgiven. Thirdly that the law is righteous, and fourthly that God's law can be perfectly obeyed when Jesus lives within. All of Satan's charges are refuted in Christ and through Him God has given man unmistakable evidence of His love.

So, since Satan was unsuccessful in this first main attempt, he brought forward another deception, not unlike the first, but just with a little different twist, which is his last great deception. He declared that not only did mercy destroy justice, but that the death of Christ did away with God's law, and thousands, yes millions of Christians are falling for it. But think of this, if it had been possible for the law to be done away with or somehow changed, then Christ would not have had to die. Think about it. To do away with the law would be to immortalize sin and place the world under Satan's control, and that's exactly what he wanted. However, it was because the law was changeless, and that's why it was written in stone by the way, it was because the law was changeless that man could be saved only through obedience to its precepts and why Jesus was lifted up on the cross. The very means by which Christ established the law, Satan represented as destroying it, and on this point will come the last great deception.

That the law, which was spoken by God's own voice is faulty, that all or some specification of it has been set aside, is the claim which Satan now puts forward. It's the last great deception that he will bring upon the world, and he doesn't have to assail the whole law to do it. If he can lead men to disregard one precept, his purpose is gained, because **James 2:10** says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is **(what?)** guilty of all." And so, by breaking even one precept, a person is brought under Satan's control. By substituting a human law for God's law, Satan will attempt to control the whole world, and he's pretty much succeeded in doing that already, and it's all foretold in prophecy, and since we don't have a lot of time left, I'll just cut to the chase; it's the papacy and apostate Protestantism that is being used by the devil today to fulfill this prophecy. Satan works through his agents, and his agent in these last days is a Protestantism that has forgotten what they were protesting about. It's the papacy whom they are imaging, and they don't even realize it. In **Daniel 7:25** it says this great apostate

power, the papacy, would “speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws.”

There’s only one religious power in the history of the world that has attempted to change the one precept in the law that deals with time, and that’s the papacy. The honor that should be given to the fourth commandment has now been transferred to another day of the week, and thus the seventh-day Sabbath has been given up for the first day of the week, and the Protestant world follows peaceably after this child of the papacy and will one day soon persecute those who honor the day the Creator blessed and sanctified on the seventh day of creation week.

The warfare against God’s law, which began in heaven, is being continued here on earth and will continue until the end of time. Every man, woman and child will be tested on this point. Obedience or disobedience is the question to be decided by the whole world. Everyone will be called upon to choose between the law of God and the laws of men, and the choice will be very simple, yet difficult to make. There will only be two classes of people. On one side is loyalty to God and on the other, rebellion. Then the end will come. God will vindicate His law and deliver His people. On which side will you be on?

Satan and all who have joined him in rebellion will be cut off. Sin and sinners will perish, root and branch we’re told in **Malachi 4:1**, Satan the root, and his followers the branches.

When we started out we read about the wonderful way Lucifer was created, but in the end the words of Ezekiel regarding the prince of evil will be fulfilled to the very letter. You can read about his end in **Ezekiel 28** where it says God will destroy Satan and never shalt he be any more, and all those who follow his example of rebellion will suffer the same fate.

I’d like to allow ***The Great Controversy, page 764*** to wrap this up this morning. Notice what the prophet says about the final destruction of the wicked. “This is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God. The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown. God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life. . . . God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles. This accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice. By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them.

“At the beginning of the great controversy, the angels did not understand this. Had Satan and his host then been left to reap the full result of their sin, they would have perished; but it would not have been apparent to heavenly beings that this was the inevitable result

of sin. A doubt of God's goodness would have remained in their minds as evil seed, to produce its deadly fruit of sin and woe.

"But not so when the great controversy shall be ended. Then, the plan of redemption having been completed, the character of God is revealed to all created intelligences. The precepts of His law are seen to be perfect and immutable. Then sin has made manifest its nature, Satan his character. Then the extermination of sin will vindicate God's love and establish His honor before a universe of beings who delight to do His will, and in whose heart is His law.

"Well, then, might the angels rejoice as they looked upon the Saviour's cross; for though they did not then understand all, they knew that the destruction of sin and Satan was forever made certain, that the redemption of man was assured, and that the universe was made eternally secure. Christ Himself fully comprehended the results of the sacrifice made upon Calvary. To all these He looked forward when upon the cross He cried out, 'It is finished.'"

The words "It is Finished" will be spoken one more time just before Jesus steps out of the Most Holy Place, and when that happens I pray that each one of us will have chosen to be on the right side. May God help us to realize that sin is an option, but it's not an option if we want to spend eternity with Jesus and unfallen beings. We can allow the love of God to so permeate our being that obedience will not be a difficult choice, but we must take the time each day to allow that love and that truth to be absorbed into our minds. And here's one more thought as we close. There is no sin in being tempted, but in yielding to the temptation, and as we spend the required time feeding the divine nature each day the power to resist temptation will be given by the One who was tempted in all points such as we are, yet without sin.