

Paul and the Rebellion



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 5:12–21, 1 Cor. 3:12–17, 1 Cor. 12:14–26, Eph. 6:11–17, 1 Cor. 15:12–18.*

Memory Text: “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’” (*1 Corinthians 15:54, NIV*).

Paul’s writings abound with the great controversy theme. There’s no question that Paul believed not only in the reality of Satan but also in the reality of his work of deceit and death. In numerous places, Paul warned of Satan’s “schemes” (*Eph. 6:11, NIV*), of his powerful deceptions (*2 Cor. 11:14*), and even of his supernatural powers (*2 Thess. 2:9*).

But as anyone who has read Paul knows, the apostle’s emphasis has always been on Christ and His ultimate victory for us. However much Satan succeeded in overcoming God’s covenant people through the centuries, the devil utterly failed against Jesus, and in Jesus all the covenant promises have been fulfilled, thus ensuring salvation for all who claim it in faith and obedience, Jew and Gentile. Christ’s faithfulness also ensures the ultimate demise of Satan (*Heb. 2:14*) and the end of the great controversy.

This week we will look at some of the images and metaphors that Paul used in explaining the reality of the battle and how we are to live, working together for the good of the whole as a church and a community of believers engaged in this cosmic struggle.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 5.

Adam and Jesus

While Paul is best known for his clear exposition of the gospel, his explanation of the great controversy is also crucial. In the midst of his teaching the good news, he summarizes his main points: we have been “justified by faith” through Jesus (*Rom. 5:1*); we have direct access to God, and we “rejoice in hope” (*Rom. 5:2*); and tribulations no longer worry us (*Rom. 5:3–5*). He also gives us the promise that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8*) and that we are now “saved” by Christ’s life and death on our behalf. We also are spared from God’s last judgment against sin (*Rom. 5:9, 10*), and we rejoice that we have been reconciled to Him (*Rom. 5:11*).

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

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

Now humankind could be restored. Just as death had “reigned” because of Adam’s sin, now “abundance of grace” and “the gift of righteousness” could reign because of Jesus’ faithfulness (*Rom. 5:17*). It is not fair that we lost paradise because of Adam. We had no part in his wrong choice; yet, we suffer the consequences of it. However, neither is it fair that we regain paradise. We had nothing to do with what Jesus did two thousand years ago. Paul summarizes his argument in Romans 5:18–21. The first Adam brought condemnation and death; the second brought reconciliation and life.

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

The Church “Building”

“The church of Christ, enfeebled and defective as it may be, is the only object on earth on which He bestows His supreme regard.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 284.

Nowhere is this classic Ellen G. White statement better illustrated than in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul likens 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 Cor. 3:4–9*).

Paul continues his point, now by describing the church as a building. Someone sets the foundation and then various others build upon it (*1 Cor. 3:10*). Because the foundation is none other than Christ (*1 Cor. 3:11*), then those who follow must be careful about what sort of material they use. The coming judgment will distinguish between inferior and suitable “building materials” (*1 Cor. 3:12–15*).

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

Now look at 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 Cor. 3:16, 17, ESV*).

We need to notice two things. The first is that the context is speaking about the church and how it is built up. It is not talking primarily about health. God does not destroy people who abuse their bodies with bad lifestyle choices; they destroy themselves. (Later, Paul does talk about our bodies being the temple of the Holy Spirit in connection with our moral choices in 1 Corinthians 6:15–20.)

The second thing is that each time the word *you* is mentioned in these two verses, it is plural in the Greek. An individual is not being addressed, but a group. 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?

The Church as a Body

The role and functions of the church are clearly spelled out in 1 Corinthians 12. Here we find the church likened to a body, and with the role of each of its members clearly defined and working together as a harmonious whole (*1 Cor. 12:12*).

Read 1 Corinthians 12:14–26. What is the essential message of this passage?

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

Previously, Paul outlines various activities in the church, describing each as a gift of the Holy Spirit. There are those who speak with wisdom and others who are very knowledgeable about Scripture (*1 Cor. 12:8*). There are those whose faith is an inspiration to all, and there are those with a healing touch (*1 Cor. 12:9*). There are miracle workers, people with prophetic insight, those who can clearly distinguish between good and evil, and those who can break through language barriers (*1 Cor. 12:10*). Note that the individuals concerned are not the ones to decide their own ability. Instead, the Holy Spirit has handpicked each of them from different backgrounds to build up and bring unity to the body, the church (*1 Cor. 12:11–13*). To underscore this important fact, Paul repeats himself: God is the one who decides where each member fits (*1 Cor. 12:18*).

Most important, despite the many members, there is only one body; each member is vitally linked to all the others, even those who do not consider themselves worth much (*1 Cor. 12:20–24*). This interdependence has built-in protections to ensure the safety and well-being of each. The interdependence comes into play when hurts and rejoicing are shared (*1 Cor. 12:26*).

Some bodies struggle with autoimmune diseases: when one part of the body attacks another part. These diseases can be debilitating, even fatal. Considering today’s texts, how does the enemy work to undermine the body, and how can we stem this attack?

The Armor of God

The reality of the great controversy, and that we are in a literal battle with a real enemy (*Eph. 6:11*), is revealed by Paul's use of war imagery in Ephesians 6.

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

It is not what the various pieces of armor are all about but rather what they represent that counts. Notice that Paul stresses that we need to take *all of the armor*, not just selected pieces of it. In so doing we will remain standing (*Eph. 6:13*), a metaphor used in the Bible to describe innocence in judgment (*compare with Ps. 1:5*). In other words, we will be victorious.

What holds all the armor in place is the belt, used as a metaphor for the truth (*Eph. 6:14*). Thus, the truth is what holds all our spiritual defenses in place. Jesus often talked about truth (*John 1:14, 17; 4:24; 8:32; 14:6*). The breastplate of righteousness follows (*Eph. 6:14*); *righteousness* is another key word in Jesus' discourses (*for example, Matt. 5:6, 10; 6:33*). In the Old Testament, righteousness was understood as upholding justice and ensuring that everyone had a fair deal.

The military sandals (*Eph. 6:15*) represent the gospel of peace, an expression borrowed from Isaiah 52:7, which speaks about people walking vast distances to let people in captivity know that Jerusalem has been rebuilt and that God has restored the freedom of His people. It is another way of saying 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 (*Eph. 6:16*) prevents "fire arrows" from hitting their intended target and causing wholesale destruction. The helmet of salvation (*Eph. 6:17*) parallels the crown Jesus shares with us (*Rev. 1:6, 2:10*), and the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) is our only weapon of self-defense, to be used as Jesus did when tempted by the devil (*Matt. 4:4, 7, 10*).

What does the fullness and completeness of the 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?

The Last Enemy

Evidently some in the church at Corinth were confused about the resurrection. Paul carefully explains its importance as a key element of the gospel (*1 Cor. 15:1–4*). It seems there is some concern about the believers who have died (*1 Cor. 15:6*), and some are suggesting that those who have died would miss out on Jesus' return (*1 Cor. 15:12*). This is similar to the situation in Thessalonica (*1 Thess. 4:13–17*).

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

Paul concludes his argument by saying that “if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (*1 Cor. 15:19, NKJV*). To the contrary, Christ has indeed risen and has become “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (*1 Cor. 15:20, NKJV*).

Then Paul compares Christ with Adam: “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (*1 Cor. 15:22, NKJV*), and he specifies when that general resurrection will be: “at His coming” (*1 Cor. 15: 23, NKJV*). Later in the chapter he continues with the comparison of the two “Adams” (*1 Cor. 15:45–49*). The first man was made from the dust, but the heavenly Man 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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (*1 Cor. 15:52, 53, NKJV*).

Although Adam was at first made to live forever, the human race soon deteriorated to the point of living only for a relatively short time. If we are to inherit eternal life, we will be made to last forever, and that's what we will be given.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:23–26. Though we are immersed in the great controversy now, and though death and evil and unholy forces seem to dominate the world, what do these verses tell us about how the great controversy ends? How can we learn to look beyond what we see and grasp what these promises mean for each one of us, personally?

Further Thought: “Not only man but the earth also had by sin come under the control of the wicked one, and was to be restored by the plan of redemption. At his creation, Adam was placed in dominion over the earth. But by yielding to temptation, he was brought under the power of Satan, and the dominion which he held passed to his conqueror. Thus Satan became ‘the god of this world.’ He had usurped that dominion over the earth which had been originally given to Adam. But Christ, by His sacrifice paying the penalty of sin, would not only redeem man, but recover the dominion which he had forfeited. All that was lost by the first Adam will be restored by the second.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, November 4, 1908. It’s so easy, though, as we look around at the world, to forget the crucial truth that Satan is defeated and that his “‘time is short’” (*Rev. 12:12, NIV*). Evil, death, and suffering pervade this world, though we are promised that, because of what Christ has done, all these will be eradicated. Also, if it isn’t clear to us by now, it ought to be: these will not be eradicated by anything we as humans do, except if we completely destroyed the earth and all life on it, which we’d probably do if given enough time, and God didn’t hold us back. Only the supernatural intervention of God will bring the promised changes for us. We certainly can’t take care of the problems ourselves.

Discussion Questions:

① “Enfeebled and defective, needing constantly to be warned and counseled, the church is nevertheless the object of Christ’s supreme regard. He is making experiments of grace on human hearts, and is effecting such transformations of character that angels are amazed, and express their joy in songs of praise. They rejoice to think that sinful, erring human beings can be so transformed.”—Ellen G. White, “The Signal of Advance,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 20, 1903. **What are some of the ways that we are transformed by what Jesus does for and in us?**

② **How do we see the great controversy expressed within the church, either at the local level or in the church as a whole? 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 when people just don’t agree on what we might believe are crucial points?**

“This Is Your Last Opportunity”: Part 3

The story thus far: Dorandina, a Satanist high priestess, received dreams of a man dressed in white, but she always dismissed the dream. After becoming very ill, Dorandina ended up at the hospital and fell into a coma. During the third time she saw the dream, the man told Dorandina to go to the Marcos Seventh-day Adventist Church. She began studying the Bible and decided to become a Christian.

I wanted to study about God. The more I studied, the more I realized that my alliance with the devil was wrong and would result in my eternal condemnation.

Many people came to me to ask me to perform ceremonies for them. I told them that I could not do this because I had become a Christian. “But I can pay double,” some offered. But still I refused.

My husband became angry. “How are we going to pay our bills if you don’t work?” he demanded.

My grown children stopped speaking to me, stopped caring for me. Now that I had no money for them, they had no time for me. My husband threatened to leave me if I did not return to my work as a spirit medium, but still I studied the Bible.

The devil did not let me go without a fight. I destroyed the statues and all the devil’s charms, and I told the women who worked under me that I had become a Christian and would no longer practice devil worship with them. These women went to the cemetery where I had practiced with them. They killed a chicken and offered its blood to the devil in exchange for my death. But God protected me, and I didn’t become ill. After studying the Bible, I was baptized into the Marcos Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I’m old now, and my doctor says I don’t have a long time to live, but I want to say that if Jesus can transform my life, He can transform anyone’s life. I am so grateful to God, for He gave me the message of salvation. I know if I die soon, I will be saved forever, because God loved me enough to send His angel to call me out of devil worship and into His faith.

DORANDINA SOUSA MELO, *from Belém, Brazil.*

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 Corinthians 15:54*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Review the great controversy theme in Pauline writings in relation to the church, salvation, and the victory of Christ and His followers, including victory over death.

Feel: Experience hope, knowing that death and other human woes will end when Christ comes.

Do: Abide in Christ amid the spiritual warfare that we all face.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Christians Struggle Not Only as Individuals Against Satan but Also as a Church.

A How do the parallels between Christ and Adam in Pauline writings develop the great controversy theme?

B Why is death the last enemy to be defeated? Discuss.

II. Feel: In the Church's Struggle Against Evil, the Ultimate Victory Is Over Death.

A How do the metaphors used to describe the church enable us to relate to one another as members of the church?

B How does the hope of the resurrection help church members face the daily struggles against evil?

III. Do: Putting On the Whole Armor of God

A What should you do this week that will demonstrate that you are putting on the whole armor of God?

B In what way does the hope of the resurrection inform how you minister to a family that is grieving the loss of a loved one?

► **Summary:** It is important for us to proclaim the hope we have in the resurrection to a world that has seen its fair share of suffering, pain, and death. We shall overcome death because, by His resurrection, Christ has destroyed the devil and the power of death for each of us.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *1 Corinthians 15:54*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: While death remains a constant reminder of our human frailty, Christ has conquered the grave for us. The hope of the resurrection is a profound source of comfort to us, both as individual Christians and as a church, as we struggle against evil in this world.

Just for Teachers: This study calls for members of the class to rejoice in the hope of the resurrection and to appreciate the importance of pulling together as a church. Even though each of us is accountable to God individually, the church, as God’s family of believers, has an important role in nurturing other believers in order to be better able to withstand the assaults of the devil.

Opening Activity: Invite members of the class to discuss how the idea of the resurrection speaks to them personally. Ask volunteers to share experiences concerning how they dealt with the death of a loved one, including the period of sickness that often precedes it.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Paul asserts the reality of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Christ’s victory is rightly emphasized. Satan is a defeated enemy, and the last bit of the consequences of his deception—death—has been conquered by Christ’s resurrection.

Bible Commentary

I. Christ Succeeded Where Adam Failed (*Review Romans 5:12–21 with your class.*)

Adam, by his and Eve’s transgression, brought sin into the world. With it came disobedience, death, judgment, and condemnation. Christ, on the other hand, has brought the free gift of grace, and with it justification, righteousness, obedience, and eternal life to all who receive Him by faith.

The comparison between the effects of Adam’s sin and that of Christ’s righteousness cannot be clearer: “Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to

justification and life for all” (*Rom. 5:18, NRSV*). When we have faith in Jesus, God counts the righteousness of Jesus as ours. This is called righteousness by faith, and for Seventh-day Adventists this is what the third angel’s message is all about. In 1905, Ellen G. White wrote, “Christ and His righteousness—let this be our platform, the very life of our faith.”—*Evangelism*, p. 190. In an article published in 1890, she wrote, “Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel’s message in verity.’”—*Evangelism*, p. 190.

Consider This: Many people in our postmodern world scoff at the existence of Satan. How does Paul’s teaching insist on the reality of Satan and how Christ has overcome him?

■ *In what ways was Adam a type of Christ (Rom. 5:12–14)?*

II. The Power of the Resurrection (*Review 1 Corinthians 15:12–19 with your class.*)

Without the resurrection of Christ, the preaching of the gospel is in vain. Without it, there is no reason for being for the church or for the entire Christian faith (*1 Cor. 15:14*). Little wonder, then, that Satan tries by all means possible to convince individuals that there is no resurrection.

By the time of Christ adherents of the Jewish sect of Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, even though this concept was present in the Old Testament (*Dan. 12:2, 13; 1 Sam. 2:6, etc.*). Paul’s incisive statement bears repeating here: “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (*1 Cor. 15:19, NRSV*). However, for Paul, Christ has indeed risen from the dead (*1 Cor. 15:20*). Of all the tragedies brought to our world following humanity’s disobedience, death is the ultimate consequence of sin and is the final enemy to be defeated (*1 Cor. 15:26*).

Consider This: Satan fully understands the loss to his cause if people were to believe in the resurrection, and with it, in the risen Savior. How is the great controversy being fought over the issue of the resurrection?

III. The Church as a Body Faces Its Enemy (*Review 1 Corinthians 12:14–26 with your class.*)

First Corinthians 12:12–31 uses the human body as a metaphor for the church. Just as the body is one, with different parts and organs, so the

church is one body with individual members that form the different parts and organs of the corps of believers. The symbol of the church as a body underscores, in part, unity; and also how diversity can serve the larger purpose of unity.

Paul bases his understanding of unity in the Trinity (see his reference to the Spirit, the Lord, and God in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6). At issue for Paul is how differences in ethnicity (*1 Cor. 12:13*) and differences in abilities and in spiritual gifts (*1 Cor. 12:28*) can serve the single purpose of building God’s kingdom.

As we would expect, Satan cannot be happy if Christians are united in the sense that Paul envisions. Satan is determined to sow seeds of discord, division, tension, prejudices, and even hatred among us. The result is that members of Christ’s body, the church, quibble over differences in form (who or what we are as people) and function (what we do, who does what, and how we do things).

Discussion Questions: While unity is essential to the mission of the church, different people may understand unity in different ways. What constitutes unity? How can the Seventh-day Adventist Church demonstrate its unity?

IV. Direct Combat With the Evil One (*Review Ephesians 6:11–17 with your class.*)

In Ephesians 6:10–17, we see one of the clearest understandings in Scripture of the great controversy as a spiritual warfare. Here, the devil (Greek, *diabolos*; compare *Rev. 12:9*) is named as the archenemy (*Eph. 6:11*), who uses deceptive schemes (Greek, *methodeia*, which recalls the serpent’s shrewdness in Genesis 3:1). The nature of the engagement with the devil is also described as a “struggle” or a “fight” (Greek *pale*, *Eph. 6:12*).

The forces of evil are described as daunting, putting the reader in mind of the dragon of Revelation 12. The struggle in this passage of Scripture is against “rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil” (*Eph. 6:12, NRSV*). Clearly, God’s people, on their own, cannot begin to be a match for such determined forces of evil. And this is where the full armor of God comes in: the belt of truth on the waist, the breastplate of righteousness, feet that hasten to bring the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit (*Eph. 6:14–17*).

Consider This: How does the spiritual armor, promised in Ephesians 6:14–17, afford us protection from the powers of evil and spiritual darkness?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: This week’s study focuses on the themes of unity and the importance of various functions within the body of believers. How does the body metaphor teach us not to regard some responsibilities as more important than others?

Thought Questions:

① How does Christ’s victory over Satan become ours?

② Why is it important that each of us belongs to a church, a local congregation, or an organization or denomination such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Why does it matter which church one belongs to?

③ What evidence is there that Paul considered the church important in the life of a Christian? Discuss.

④ What should individuals do if they feel that the local church in which they hold membership is not living up to its mission?

Activity: What makes unity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church an imperative? How should the symbolism of the church as a body influence how we treat and relate to one another in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? What role should diversity play in unity?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The centrality of the Resurrection and our desire to share that hope with the world should form the basis on which we resist the attacks and unveil the deceptions of the enemy.

Activity: Dwell on themes about the Resurrection, about justification by faith, about spiritual warfare, about unity and diversity, church membership, church organization, and various forms of ministry in the church. What can you do this week to promote or to realize these themes in your own life?