THE SIN PROBLEM

Its Origin, Its Nature, and Its Final Solution

DAVID CLAYTON

The one God · The two Adams · The three judgments

CONTENTS

Introduction The Problem Behind the Problem

Chapter 1 The Origin and Nature of the Sin Problem

Chapter 2 The Two Adams: How Humanity Could Be Restored

Chapter 3 The Cross: The Vindication of God's Character

Chapter 4 The Government of God: Freedom Through Surrender

Chapter 5 The Final Judgment: The End of the Great Controversy

Scripture quotations follow the wording used in the manuscript.

INTRODUCTION

The Problem Behind the Problem

Why does sin exist? Why did God allow it to develop, and why has He permitted it to continue for so long? Why was it necessary for Jesus Christ to become a man, suffer, and die? And why does the Bible place such great emphasis upon judgment, even after Christ has accomplished His work on earth?

These questions are closely related. They cannot be fully answered independently of each other because they are all connected to one great controversy that began in heaven long before humanity existed.

Most Christians understand the sin problem primarily in terms of human wrongdoing. Man disobeyed God, became guilty of sin, and needed forgiveness. Jesus came to die for our sins so that we might be forgiven and receive eternal life. There is truth in this understanding, but it does not explain the complete problem or the full purpose of God's plan. In particular, it does not adequately explain why sin arose in the first place, why God did not immediately eliminate it, or why salvation involves so much more than forgiveness.

To understand these things, we must begin where sin began. We must examine the original controversy in heaven, the accusations that gave rise to rebellion, and the questions that must be answered before the controversy can finally end.

The central truth is that sin began with false ideas about God. Therefore, the permanent solution to sin must include a complete revelation of the truth about God.

This principle provides the key to understanding the incarnation, the ministry of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the experience of the church, and the final judgment.

THE THREE AREAS OF ATTACK

1. The character of God
2. The government of God
3. The justice of God

THE THREE RESULTING PROBLEMS

1. Distrust of God
2. Separation from God
3. Sinful behavior

THE THREE KEY ANSWERING DOCTRINES

1. The one God
2. The two Adams
3. The three judgments

CHAPTER 1

THE CENTRAL ISSUE / THE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST GOD

The Origin and Nature of the Sin Problem



Lucifer seeks to undermine trust in God through persuasion.

The Original Controversy

The Bible indicates that rebellion began in heaven with a highly privileged angel who became dissatisfied with his position. Ezekiel 28:12-17 describes a being who was originally perfect in his ways but whose heart became lifted up because of his beauty. Isaiah 14:12-14 describes the ambition of one who sought to exalt himself and become like the Most High. Although these passages also address earthly kings, their language has long been understood by many Christians as pointing beyond those rulers to the rebellion of Satan.

Revelation 12:7-9 describes the resulting conflict in heaven, in which Michael and His angels fought against the dragon and his angels. The dragon is identified as Satan, the one who deceives the whole world.

This description reveals something important about the nature of the controversy. Satan did not merely become dissatisfied with his position and decide to disobey God. He persuaded other intelligent beings to join him. His rebellion depended upon convincing them that his position was right and that God's position was wrong.

What kind of arguments could persuade sinless angels, living in the presence of God, to reject Him?

The evidence of Scripture, particularly the methods Satan later employed on earth, suggests that his attack was directed against two fundamental aspects of God: His character and His government. He represented God as selfish, as One who was primarily concerned with maintaining His own position and authority. At the same time, he portrayed God's government as restrictive, suggesting that genuine freedom and fulfillment could be found only by escaping His control.

This explains why the conflict was so dangerous. Satan was not simply encouraging disobedience. He was undermining confidence in God Himself. Once intelligent beings accepted the idea that God was selfish and His government oppressive, rebellion could appear to be justified. Rejecting God could be mistaken for pursuing freedom.

The essential issue, then, was not behavior but belief. Wrong behavior was the consequence of a deeper problem: distrust of God.

This distinction is vital because it determines the kind of solution that is necessary. If sin were merely the breaking of rules, God

could address the problem by enforcing those rules more effectively. But if sin originated in false ideas about God's character and government, then stronger enforcement would not remove the underlying cause.

God possessed unlimited power to destroy the rebels, but the exercise of that power would not answer their accusations. Indeed, immediate destruction might have strengthened the suspicion that God was intolerant of opposition and maintained His authority through force.

The controversy had begun through deception. It could be permanently settled only through the exposure of that deception.

This is why God allowed the rebellion to develop. The true nature of Satan's principles and the true nature of God's character and government had to become evident. Intelligent beings needed sufficient evidence to recognize for themselves which position was right.

The controversy was therefore, at its heart, a war of ideas. It would be fought through words, demonstrations, and experience, and it would ultimately be settled through judgment based upon evidence.

The Controversy Reaches Humanity

When Satan approached the human family, he used essentially the same strategy that had succeeded in heaven. He attacked confidence in God.

In Genesis 3:1-5, the serpent questioned God's command and suggested that God was withholding something desirable from Adam and Eve. His promise was that disobedience would open their

eyes and make them like God, knowing good and evil. The implication was unmistakable: God could not be fully trusted, and greater freedom and fulfillment could be found by disregarding His instructions.

When Adam chose to disobey, the consequences extended far beyond the eating of forbidden fruit. As the representative head of humanity, he accepted Satan's position and transferred his allegiance away from God.

This choice resulted in separation from the divine life. Humanity lost the presence of God's Spirit as the governing principle of its existence, and the consequences appeared immediately. Fear, shame, self-justification, and alienation replaced the innocence and confidence that had previously characterized the relationship between man and God.

God alone is the source of true goodness. Righteousness is not an independent quality that human beings can produce by effort, education, or determination. It exists in God, and His creatures possess it only through living connection with Him. When humanity was separated from that source, the loss of righteousness was inevitable. Evil is not a competing source of life; it describes the condition and the resulting behavior of creatures who have become separated from the only source of goodness.

The sequence is important. Adam's disobedience brought separation from God, and that separation produced the condition in which sinful behavior became natural. His descendants inherited that condition, so that the entire human family became involved in the consequences of his choice.

Paul explains this corporate consequence in Romans 5:12, where he states that sin entered the world through one man, and death

through sin. Later, in verse 19, he declares that by one man's disobedience many were made sinners. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 15:22 states, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

These passages point to something much deeper than the idea that Adam merely set a bad example which his descendants subsequently followed. Humanity became involved in his fallen condition because he was the head of the human family. His descendants did not begin life in the same spiritual condition in which Adam had originally been created. They were born into a race already separated from God.

This explains why the Bible describes fallen humanity as being under the power of sin. Romans 8:7 states that the carnal mind is enmity against God and is not subject to His law. Jeremiah 13:23 asks whether the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots, and then compares this impossibility to those who are accustomed to doing evil learning to do good.

The problem is not simply that people have developed bad habits. The problem is that fallen humanity lacks the divine life that produces true righteousness.

A tree produces fruit according to its nature. We cannot change the nature of the tree merely by attempting to improve the appearance of its fruit. In the same way, a person cannot become truly righteous merely by correcting outward behavior while remaining inwardly separated from God.

Humanity's fundamental problem is not simply that people do wrong things. People do wrong things because they belong to a fallen humanity that has lost the life of God.

This is why the solution must be more than forgiveness, moral instruction, or improved behavior. The human family needs a new life, and that life must come through a new representative.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The rebellion began with accusations against God's character and government, not merely with disobedient actions.
- Satan portrayed God as selfish and His government as an obstacle to freedom.
- Force could suppress rebellion but could not disprove the accusations that produced it.
- Adam's distrust separated humanity from God's life; sinful behavior flows from that fallen condition.
- Humanity needs restoration of divine life, not merely forgiveness or improved outward conduct.

CHAPTER 2

THE CENTRAL ISSUE / THE TRUE SON AND THE NEW HUMANITY

The Two Adams: How Humanity Could Be Restored

Why a Second Adam Was Necessary

There is a principle of justice involved in the way humanity came under Satan's control. Satan did not simply seize the human race by force. He obtained the consent of Adam, the representative head of humanity. Adam made a choice, and through that choice the human family came under the consequences of Satan's dominion.

If God's government is founded upon genuine freedom, then the restoration of humanity must respect the same principle. God cannot simply disregard the human choice that brought the race into bondage and impose His government upon humanity by superior power. To do so would contradict the very principles of freedom and justice that Satan had challenged.

The reversal of Adam's decision therefore required another genuine human choice.

But this created an apparently impossible problem. Every natural descendant of Adam belonged to the fallen race and inherited its alienated condition. Such a person could not, by his own resources, overcome the condition of humanity and make the perfect choice necessary to reverse Adam's failure.

The human family needed a new representative, but it could not produce that representative from within its own fallen condition.

This is why Jesus Christ came into the world.

Paul identifies Jesus as the last Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:45. The comparison is deliberate. Just as the first Adam stood at the head of the original human family, Christ became the head of a new humanity. Romans 5:18-19 presents the actions of these two men as having consequences for the many who are represented by them. Through the disobedience of one came condemnation and sin; through the obedience of the other came the basis for justification and righteousness.

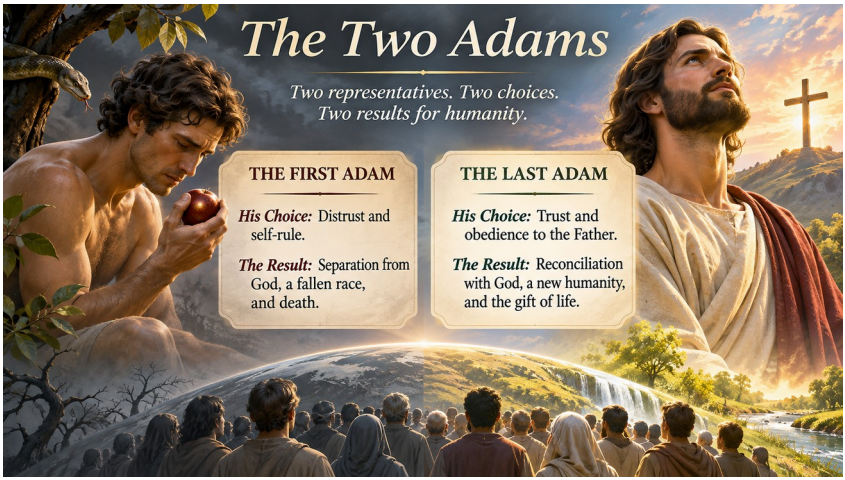
The significance of Christ's mission, then, is not merely that He came to show us how to live. He came to accomplish something on behalf of the entire human family that no ordinary descendant of Adam could accomplish.

He came to make the choice that Adam had failed to make.

Where Adam chose Satan's way, Christ chose God's way. Where Adam surrendered humanity to the dominion of sin, Christ established a new humanity in which righteousness and life could be restored.

However, this raises another important question. What qualified Jesus to succeed where Adam and all his descendants had failed?

The answer lies in His unique identity as the actual, begotten Son of God.



The Two Adams — two representative choices and their consequences.

The Unique Qualification of God's Son

The Bible identifies Jesus as the Son of God and presents Him as the perfect revelation of His Father. Hebrews 1:3 describes Him as the express image of God's person, while John 14:9 records His declaration, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

The significance of these statements becomes especially clear when we recognize that Jesus is the actual Son of God, distinct from the Father, and possessing by inheritance the Father's own character.

A son naturally inherits the nature of his father. In the case of Jesus, this means that He inherited the pure, holy, loving, and unselfish character of divinity. His goodness was not something artificially imposed upon Him. It belonged to His very nature as God's Son.

But we must make an important distinction between divine character and divine power.

The Son inherited the character of divinity, but divine power was bestowed upon Him by His Father. This distinction is suggested by passages such as John 5:26, where Jesus declares that the Father has given the Son to have life in Himself, and Matthew 28:18, where He states that all authority has been given to Him in heaven and earth. These passages present the Father as the source and giver, and the Son as the recipient.

The distinction becomes especially important when we consider the incarnation.

Philippians 2:5-8 describes Christ as humbling Himself, taking the form of a servant, and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Hebrews 2:14-17 emphasizes that He genuinely participated in human flesh and blood and was made like His brethren.

In becoming a man, Jesus did not retain the divine power previously bestowed upon Him as a personal resource upon which He could independently rely. That power was laid aside. He entered human life subject to its genuine limitations, weaknesses, and dependence upon God.

His miracles were performed through the power of His Father, not through the independent exercise of an inherent omnipotence. Jesus Himself declared, "The Son can do nothing of himself" (John 5:19), and again, "The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works" (John 14:10). Acts 10:38 similarly describes God as anointing Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.

Yet there was one essential difference between Jesus and ordinary fallen humanity. Though He possessed genuine human limitations, His character remained inherently pure and holy. He did not

possess the sinful nature produced by separation from God. His character was the inherited character of His divine Father.

This made Him uniquely qualified for two closely related tasks. As a genuine man, He could represent humanity and reverse Adam's choice. As the actual Son of God, possessing His Father's character, He could reveal the truth about the One whom Satan had accused.

These two purposes came together in His earthly life, and particularly in His suffering and death.

This is also why the doctrine of the Trinity creates a serious difficulty for this understanding of the controversy. By presenting the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three coequal, coeternal divine persons, it does not preserve the same distinction between the Father as the supreme source and Jesus as His actual begotten Son. Nor does it explain Christ's inherited character and bestowed power in the way this argument requires.

Within the framework we are considering, these distinctions are not minor theological details. They explain how Christ could become genuinely human while retaining the character that made Him the perfect revelation of His Father.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Adam's representative choice brought the human family under the consequences of separation from God.
- Restoration required another genuine human choice, made by a new representative: the last Adam.
- Jesus is uniquely qualified as the actual Son of God, distinct from the Father, inheriting His holy character.
- Christ laid aside bestowed divine power.

- As man He could reverse Adam's choice; as God's Son He could reveal the Father's character.

CHAPTER 3

THE CENTRAL ISSUE / THE CHARACTER OF GOD REVEALED

The Cross: The Vindication of God's Character



At the cross, the Son reveals the unselfish character of His Father.

To appreciate the full significance of the cross, we must remember the original accusation against God. Satan had claimed, in effect, that God was selfish and that His goodness could not be trusted.

How could this accusation be conclusively answered?

God could make declarations about His love, but the controversy required more than declarations. He could perform extraordinary acts of kindness, but the question concerned His deepest motives. Was His character truly unselfish, or was His goodness merely the

conduct of One who possessed unlimited power and could never be threatened?

The life of Jesus provided a unique answer.

Here was the actual Son of God, possessing His Father's inherited character, but living as a genuine human being without inherent divine power. His conduct could therefore reveal what the character of divinity was really like when exposed to the limitations, suffering, and vulnerability of human existence.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus demonstrated compassion, patience, forgiveness, humility, and self-sacrifice. He cared for the weak, welcomed the rejected, and loved those who opposed Him. His entire life was a revelation of His Father's character. But the supreme demonstration came during the final hours of His earthly experience.

In Gethsemane, Jesus faced the terrible prospect of the suffering and death that lay before Him. Matthew 26:38 records His words, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Luke 22:42 records His prayer, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."

These words reveal a genuine struggle. Jesus was not merely acting out a predetermined scene in which suffering and temptation were only appearances. He experienced the full reality of human distress, and His submission to the Father's will was a genuine choice made under extreme pressure.

But this raises an important question. If Jesus possessed an inherently holy character, was it genuinely possible for Him to choose otherwise? Could His temptation have been real if His character was perfectly good?

The answer lies in understanding the relationship between freedom of choice and character.

Freedom of choice means that a person possesses the ability to choose. The choice is not imposed by an external force or determined by a mechanical necessity. But the fact that a person is free to choose does not mean that every possible choice is equally attractive to him. His choices are influenced by what he is, by his character and nature.

Jesus possessed genuine freedom. There was no external mechanism that prevented Him from choosing selfishness. He could have chosen contrary to love, in the sense that He possessed the power of choice. But His character was the perfectly holy and unselfish character of God, and therefore He would never make such a choice.

This distinction is crucial. **The certainty of Christ's victory did not arise from an inability to choose, but from the perfection of the character with which He chose.** His freedom made the test genuine; His character made His victory certain.

In this sense, a selfish choice was possible because Christ was genuinely free, yet impossible in the light of what His character truly was.

And this is precisely what the controversy needed to establish.

If Christ, possessing His Father's inherited character, could have been induced to choose selfishness under sufficient pressure, that would have demonstrated that the character of God was not absolutely trustworthy. It would mean that divine love could fail under certain circumstances.

But Christ's faithfulness under the most extreme conditions demonstrated that the character of divinity was inherently and permanently good.

The cross carried this test to its ultimate conclusion. Jesus endured humiliation, rejection, suffering, and death. Yet even under these conditions, His response remained consistent with the unselfish character He had inherited from His Father.

He did not abandon love when love became costly. He did not become selfish when self-preservation seemed to demand it. He did not reject His Father's way when faithfulness required the sacrifice of everything.

When divine power was not available as a means of personal escape, the character of divine love remained unchanged.

This demonstrated something deeper than the fact that God had never acted selfishly. It demonstrated why God could be trusted never to become selfish.

Here was proof that unselfishness was not merely a policy adopted by God because He occupied a position of unlimited security and power. It was the very nature of divinity itself.

Furthermore, this evidence came through One who was genuinely distinct from the Father. Jesus was not simply the Father appearing in another form and testifying about Himself. He was the actual Son, possessing His Father's character by inheritance, and therefore capable of providing a distinct and credible revelation of what the Father is like.

This is why the true relationship between God and His Son is so important to the controversy. The identity of Jesus is directly connected to the credibility and significance of His testimony.

In John 12:31, as Jesus approached His death, He declared, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out." In verse 32 He connected this judgment with His approaching death, speaking of being lifted up from the earth.

The cross exposed the character of Satan while revealing the character of God. Satan's principles led to hatred and murder; the character inherited from God was revealed in love and self-sacrifice.

The first great question of the controversy was answered. God's character was vindicated through His Son.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The cross addresses the accusation that God is selfish and cannot be fully trusted.
- Jesus experienced genuine vulnerability, suffering, and freedom of choice without relying on divine power for personal escape.
- His victory was certain because of His perfectly unselfish character, not because His choices were externally constrained.
- The Son's steadfast love reveals not only that God has acted unselfishly, but why His character will always be trustworthy.
- Through Christ's life and death, God's character is vindicated and Satan's principles are exposed.

CHAPTER 4

THE CENTRAL ISSUE / GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND TRUE FREEDOM

The Government of God: Freedom Through Surrender

Law or Life?

But the vindication of God's character did not settle every issue raised by Satan. There remained the question of God's government.

Satan had suggested that God's government was restrictive and that true freedom could be found only outside His authority. It was therefore necessary to demonstrate not only that God was unselfish, but that His way of governing was good and capable of producing genuine righteousness.

This brings us to a distinction that is often overlooked in Christian teaching: the difference between government by external law and government through the inward presence of God's Spirit.

A law can describe what is right. It can command obedience, identify wrongdoing, and establish standards of conduct. But a law cannot, by itself, change the nature of the person to whom it is addressed. It cannot create love, produce unselfishness, or restore the divine life that was lost through Adam's transgression.

Paul makes this clear in Galatians 3:21 when he declares that if a law could have given life, righteousness would have been by the law. Romans 8:3 likewise speaks of what the law could not accomplish because of the weakness of the flesh.

This does not mean that God's commandments were evil. Romans 7:12 declares that the law is holy, just, and good. The problem was not with the goodness of the law but with its inability to produce the life and character that it described.

God's ultimate purpose was never merely to secure outward conformity to rules. His desire was to establish a living relationship with His people in which His own character would be reproduced within them.

This is the promise of the new covenant. In Ezekiel 36:26-27, God promises to give His people a new heart and to put His Spirit within them, causing them to walk in His ways. Jeremiah 31:33 describes God's law being written in the heart rather than merely presented as an external requirement.

The principle is simple. God's government does not produce righteousness by forcing people to behave correctly. It produces righteousness by giving them a new life from which correct behavior naturally proceeds.

This is the difference between attempting to make a corrupt tree produce good fruit and actually changing the nature of the tree.

But this understanding introduces a question that deserves careful consideration. If God's government operates from within the individual, does it not present an even greater threat to personal freedom than government by external law?

The Paradox of Freedom

Consider the strength of Satan's accusation. If God governs by placing His own Spirit within a person, then His influence is not merely external. It operates at the very center of that person's thoughts, desires, and motives.

Who could resist such an influence? If the almighty God were to take possession of the inner life of a created being, would that being retain any meaningful freedom?

This question gives Satan's accusation an appearance of plausibility. God's government could be represented as the ultimate form of control: not simply authority exercised over a person's actions, but an influence reaching into the very source of those actions.

Yet this is precisely where the principle of voluntary choice becomes so important.

God does not impose His indwelling presence upon those who have not chosen to receive Him. He does not simply enter the inner life of a person and take control against that person's will. Instead, He invites human beings to trust Him and to receive His life through Jesus Christ.

Jesus expresses this invitation in Revelation 3:20, where He stands at the door and knocks. The door must be opened. In John 7:37-39, He invites those who thirst to come to Him and drink, and John explains that He was speaking of the Spirit that believers would receive.

The emphasis is upon invitation and response, not forced possession.

This helps us understand why faith is so fundamental to the Christian experience.

Faith is more than believing that certain religious statements are true. It is trusting another person sufficiently to place oneself in His hands. When a person receives Christ, he voluntarily surrenders

the right to govern his life independently and accepts the government of God from within.

In one sense, this really is a relinquishing of freedom. The individual gives up the independence of self-rule. He chooses to allow another Person to become the governing influence in his life.

But there is a decisive difference between such surrender and coercion.

Coercion takes away a person's freedom against his will. Faith is the free choice to surrender one's will to someone who is trusted.

The fact that the surrender is complete does not make it involuntary. Its voluntary character is precisely what makes it an expression of freedom.

This is not merely a theoretical distinction. Human relationships provide an illustration. A person may voluntarily commit himself to another in a relationship of deep love and trust. Such commitment involves surrendering certain freedoms of independent action, yet the commitment is not necessarily oppressive. Its character depends upon the freedom with which it is entered and the trustworthiness of the one to whom the commitment is made.

The relationship between God and the believer carries this principle to its highest expression. The believer chooses to trust God completely because he has become convinced of His goodness. He no longer wishes to govern himself independently of God, because he recognizes that God's wisdom, love, and character are infinitely superior to his own.

Romans 12:1 describes this as presenting ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, while Galatians 2:20 describes the resulting experience as Christ living in the believer.

The surrender is voluntary, but the transformation is real.

There is another important consideration. Fallen humanity does not naturally possess the freedom that Satan promised. Jesus declared in John 8:34 that whoever commits sin is the servant of sin. Paul likewise describes the natural human condition as bondage to sin and corruption.

Consequently, the choice is not between perfect independence and submission to God. Fallen man is already under the influence of a sinful nature that he cannot overcome by his own strength.

When he chooses to receive Christ, he is not surrendering genuine freedom in exchange for slavery. **He is surrendering the illusion of independence in order to receive freedom from the bondage of sin.**

This explains the apparent paradox of God's government.

The believer voluntarily gives up the right to govern himself, yet in doing so he becomes truly free. His surrender is not the destruction of his personhood, but the restoration of his ability to live according to the purpose for which he was created.

Second Corinthians 3:17 declares, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

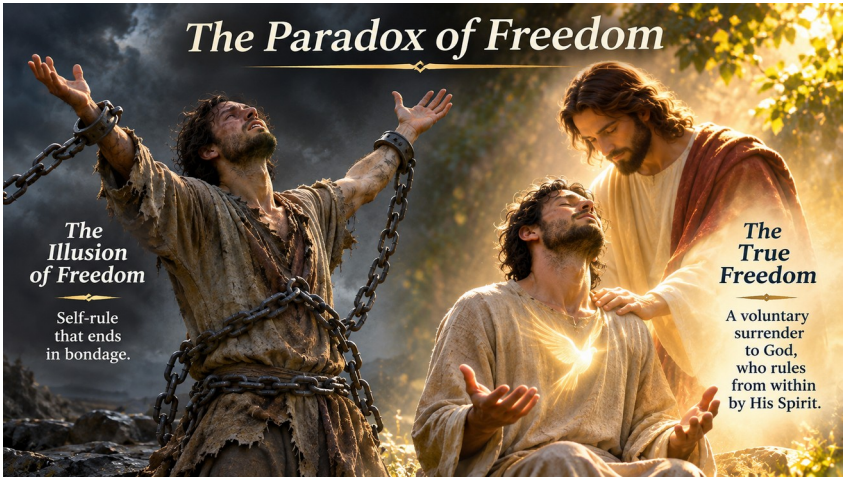
The Spirit does not produce this liberty by forcing the believer into submission. He produces it because the believer has freely chosen to trust the One whose character has been revealed through Jesus Christ.

This is why the first judgment, the revelation of God's character through His Son, is so closely connected to the second judgment, the demonstration of His government through the Spirit.

A person can safely surrender himself to God's inward government only when he is convinced that the God to whom he surrenders is absolutely trustworthy.

The cross provides the evidence of that trustworthiness. Faith is the response to the evidence. The indwelling Spirit produces the resulting transformation.

Thus, the two great demonstrations are inseparably connected. Christ reveals why God can be trusted, and the Spirit demonstrates what happens when people freely choose to trust Him.



The Paradox of Freedom — the illusion of self-rule and the freedom of voluntary surrender.

The Gift of the Spirit

Jesus did not merely succeed in living a righteous life for Himself. He became the source of a new life for humanity.

The first Adam passed on to his descendants the consequences of his separation from God. The last Adam makes available to those who receive Him the life of righteousness and fellowship with God.

In 1 Corinthians 15:45, Paul describes the first Adam as a living soul and the last Adam as a life-giving spirit. The contrast is significant. The first Adam received life and became the head of a family that eventually fell into death. Christ became the head of a new family to whom He could impart His own victorious life.

Jesus expressed this principle in John 14:18-20 when He promised His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless but would come to them. He spoke of a time when they would know that He was in His Father, they in Him, and He in them. Paul expresses the same reality in Colossians 1:27: "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The Holy Spirit is the means by which this becomes possible. In this understanding, the Spirit is not a separate divine person operating independently of God and His Son. It is the divine life and presence through which the Father and Son dwell in believers.

Through the Spirit, Christ communicates His own life to those who believe in Him.

This is the heart of the new birth. A person is not merely forgiven while remaining fundamentally unchanged. He receives a new spiritual life, a life that comes from Christ Himself. This is why Paul could declare in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

The Christian life is therefore not fundamentally an attempt to imitate Christ through human effort. It is the manifestation of Christ's own life in the believer.

Of course, the individual must choose to receive Him. Christ's victory as the last Adam restores the possibility of a genuine choice, but it does not force anyone into a relationship with God. The invitation remains open, and the individual must respond in faith.

John 1:12 speaks of those who receive Christ and believe on His name becoming the children of God. Through that choice, they become participants in the new humanity established by the last Adam.

The result is freedom from the bondage of the old life. Romans 8:2 declares that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made the believer free from the law of sin and death.

This is the freedom that Satan claimed could be found through rebellion. But the experience of the believer demonstrates that genuine freedom is found, not in separation from God, but in union with Him.

The Church and the Judgment of God's Government

The significance of the Christian church now becomes clearer.

The church is not merely an organization established to spread religious teachings. It is intended to be the corporate body of Christ, the community in which His own life is manifested through the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 1:22-23 describes the church as Christ's body, while Ephesians 3:10 indicates that God's manifold wisdom is to be made

known through the church to principalities and powers in heavenly places.

This gives the experience of the church a significance that extends far beyond the salvation of individual believers. Through the church, the universe is to witness the results of God's government operating in human lives.

The question is whether God's way of governing can accomplish what Satan claimed it could not accomplish. Can human beings, formerly enslaved by sin, become genuinely righteous and free through the inward presence of God's Spirit? Can love succeed where external control and legal requirements have failed?

The answer is to be demonstrated in the lives of those who belong to Christ.

And the voluntary nature of their surrender is essential to that demonstration. If God simply overpowered their wills and made them righteous by irresistible force, their behavior would prove very little about the goodness of His government. It might demonstrate His power, but it would not demonstrate that His way produces genuine freedom.

The church must therefore consist of people who have freely chosen to receive Christ and whose transformed lives reveal the results of that choice.

This does not mean that every person who professes Christianity already provides a perfect demonstration of God's government. The history of the church contains many failures, and religious institutions have frequently employed the very methods of coercion and control that are contrary to the principles of God's kingdom.

Nevertheless, God's purpose remains unchanged. He intends to produce a people in whom the character of Christ is genuinely manifested.

The final conflict described in Revelation 13 brings the opposing principles of government into particularly sharp focus. The chapter describes a religious-political power that uses compulsion to enforce worship and allegiance. Economic pressure and the threat of death are employed against those who refuse to submit.

In contrast, Revelation 14:12 describes the saints as those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Their faithfulness is not the product of coercion but of an inward relationship with God.

The contrast is between two fundamentally different methods of government. One relies upon external power to enforce conformity. The other produces faithfulness through the inward life of Christ, received by a voluntary act of faith.

Understood in this way, the final conflict is not merely a dispute over religious forms or outward practices. It is the culmination of the controversy over the principles of God's government.

This conflict is closely connected with the heavenly judgment described in Daniel 7.

Daniel 7:9-10 presents a scene in which the Ancient of Days takes His seat, the heavenly court is assembled, and the books are opened. The judgment occurs in the context of the activities of the fourth beast and the little horn, a power that makes war against the saints and seeks to exercise authority contrary to God.

Daniel 7:21-22 declares that the little horn prevailed against the saints until the Ancient of Days came, judgment was given in favor

of the saints, and the time arrived for them to possess the kingdom. Verses 26-27 describe the removal of the oppressive power and the establishment of God's everlasting kingdom.

The sequence is significant. The judgment is associated with the final conflict between the opposing systems of government, and it precedes the full establishment of God's kingdom. In this interpretation, the judgment belongs at the end of the present world order, before the millennium, rather than after it.

The heavenly throne-room scenes of Revelation 4 and 5 provide a related perspective. There we see the throne of God, the heavenly beings gathered around it, and the Lamb who is declared worthy to receive authority and honor. The imagery connects naturally with Daniel's vision of the heavenly court and the Son of Man receiving dominion.

Revelation 14:6-7 adds the announcement that the hour of God's judgment has come, followed by the description of the final conflict over worship and allegiance. These passages, taken together, provide a basis for understanding the judgment of Daniel 7 as the heavenly vindication of God's government and His people in the closing stages of the controversy.

The opposing systems have been allowed to operate. Their principles have been demonstrated through their actions and results. The heavenly judgment establishes which system is right and to whom the kingdom properly belongs.

The Spirit-filled church provides the evidence that God's way works. His government does not destroy freedom; it restores it. It does not depend upon force; it produces willing allegiance through love and truth.

Thus the second great question is answered. God's government is vindicated through the Holy Spirit operating in His people, and the heavenly judgment confirms the righteousness of His kingdom.



The Three Judgments — character, government, and justice.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- External law can describe righteousness but cannot impart the divine life that produces it.
- God's government operates through His Spirit within those who freely choose to receive Christ.
- Faith is a voluntary surrender of self-rule, not the coercive removal of personal freedom.
- What appears to be independence apart from God is actually bondage to sin; union with Christ brings genuine liberty.
- The last Adam imparts His life to believers, making the church a demonstration of God's inward government.
- The end-time conflict and the pre-millennial heavenly judgment reveal and vindicate the principles of God's government.

CHAPTER 5

THE CENTRAL ISSUE / THE JUSTICE OF GOD ESTABLISHED

The Final Judgment: The End of the Great Controversy

The Justice of God

There remains one final issue that must be settled before the controversy can end.

Even after God's character has been revealed through His Son and His government demonstrated through the Spirit-filled church, the question of His justice must be conclusively answered.

What about those who reject salvation? What about Satan and the angels who joined his rebellion? Is God right in His final decisions concerning their destiny?

The original controversy involved accusations against God's character and His right to govern. Consequently, the final destruction of evil must not leave any uncertainty about whether God has acted justly.

This is why a final judgment is necessary.

In Revelation 20:11-15, John describes the great white throne judgment. The dead stand before God, the books are opened, and judgment is given according to the things recorded in those books.

This judgment must be distinguished from the judgment associated with Daniel 7. The latter occurs in connection with the final conflict over God's government and the vindication of the saints before the establishment of the kingdom. The great white

throne judgment of Revelation 20 takes place after the millennium, immediately before the final destruction of evil.

The opening of the books is significant. It indicates that the judgment is connected with evidence. God's decisions are not presented as arbitrary declarations that must be accepted simply because He possesses unlimited authority.

The record is available for examination.

This principle is also reflected in Revelation 15:3-4, where God's ways are acknowledged as just and true, and in Revelation 16:5-7, where His judgments are declared to be righteous.

The purpose is not to place God under some higher authority. There is no authority greater than God. Rather, it is to demonstrate that His decisions are so completely righteous that they can withstand the fullest possible examination.

God has nothing to conceal. He does not need to protect His reputation by withholding evidence or demanding unquestioning acceptance of His verdicts.

The final judgment demonstrates that He has dealt fairly with every creature, that His offers of mercy have been genuine, and that His decisions concerning those who are lost are perfectly just.

The destruction of evil is therefore not simply the exercise of superior power over defeated enemies. It is the final act of a controversy in which the justice of that destruction has been fully established.

This is why the doctrine of judgment is essential to understanding the sin problem. If judgment is regarded merely as a formal declaration of who is saved and who is lost, its larger significance is overlooked. The controversy began with accusations, and

accusations must be answered through evidence. The final vindication of God requires that His dealings be examined and acknowledged as righteous.

When the evidence has been examined, the universe can recognize that God's judgments are right. The accusations that began the rebellion have no remaining foundation.

This is the third and final judgment: the vindication of the Father's justice.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The post-millennial great white throne judgment concerns the justice of God's final dealings with sin and the lost.
- The opened books signify that God's decisions are supported by evidence, not arbitrary assertions of power.
- This final judgment is distinct from the pre-millennial judgment associated with Daniel 7.
- The Son vindicates God's character; the Spirit-filled church demonstrates His government; the Father vindicates His justice.
- The controversy ends when every accusation has been answered and the truth about God is fully established.

The End of the Great Controversy

We can now see how the entire plan of salvation fits together.

The original rebellion raised three fundamental questions about God. Was His character truly unselfish? Was His government genuinely good and capable of producing righteousness? And was He perfectly just in His dealings with His creatures?

These questions could not be answered merely by an exercise of divine power. They required evidence, demonstration, and judgment.

The first question was answered through Jesus Christ, the actual Son of God. Possessing His Father's inherited character but living under genuine human limitations, He demonstrated the absolute unselfishness of divine love. His faithfulness under the severest test established that God's character was inherently trustworthy.

The second question was answered through the work of the Holy Spirit in the new humanity established by Christ. The life of the last Adam, communicated to believers who freely choose to receive Him, demonstrated that God's government could produce genuine righteousness and freedom without coercion. The final conflict between the opposing systems of government, together with the heavenly judgment, established the righteousness of God's way.

The third question is answered through the final great judgment, when the evidence demonstrates that God's decisions concerning sin, Satan, and those who reject salvation are perfectly just.

The Failure of Satan’s Alternative

The controversy has also demonstrated the failure of Satan’s proposed alternative. Where God’s character is unselfish love, Satan’s principle is self-exaltation. Where God’s government brings freedom through union with the source of life, Satan’s promise of independence ends in bondage to sin. Where God’s justice can be examined and vindicated by evidence, Satan’s accusations are sustained by deception and collapse when the truth is fully revealed.

The consequences are not theoretical. Distrust has led to separation, and separation has produced sin, suffering, and death. Satan's way has had opportunity to display its fruits, and it has shown itself incapable of producing either righteousness or lasting life. Its destruction is therefore not an arbitrary act by a stronger ruler silencing opposition. Once the evidence is complete and every accusation has been answered, the final removal of Satan, sin, and those who persist in choosing his principles is revealed as just and necessary for the permanent security of the universe.

At the same time, the human race is restored through the last Adam. The choice that brought humanity into bondage is reversed by another human choice. The life lost through the first Adam becomes available through Christ, and those who receive Him are brought back into fellowship with God.

The salvation of humanity and the vindication of God are therefore not two separate purposes. They are inseparably connected parts of the same great work.

But the ultimate purpose of this work reaches beyond the restoration of humanity. It is to make the universe permanently secure against the return of sin.

This requires more than the destruction of those who practice evil. It requires the complete exposure of the false ideas that originally made rebellion possible. Every accusation must be answered, every misunderstanding removed, and every question concerning God's character, government, and justice settled.

When the controversy is finally ended, God will not merely have demonstrated that He is stronger than Satan. He will have demonstrated that Satan was wrong about the very principles upon which the rebellion was founded.

His character will have been shown to be perfectly unselfish. His government will have been shown to be the only true foundation of freedom and righteousness. His judgments will have been shown to be perfectly just.

The universe will then be secure, not merely because rebellion has been suppressed, but because the truth has been established. Intelligent beings will understand why God's way is right, and their allegiance will rest upon knowledge, confidence, and love.

The prophet Nahum declares, "Affliction shall not rise up the second time" (Nahum 1:9). Understood in the light of the great controversy, this promise points to the completeness of God's final victory. The conditions that made rebellion possible will have been exposed and removed.

Sin began with a lie about God. It will end when the truth about His character, His government, and His justice has been so completely demonstrated that the lie can never again find a foundation.