

the battle over God's image

The Image of God & the Adventist Pioneers—2 of 4

KEY TEXTS—ROMANS 8:29 & 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18; 4:4

WHAT IS GOD DOING?

A couple of days ago I drove past the body of a man, a few metres from the road, who had been shot multiple times in the body and head. A third naked restaurant is opening now in Japan where you have to hand in all your clothes at the door. A girl in Florida just shot herself with her mother's gun after fellow students bullied her by sharing naked videos. Joe Biden, US VP has just written an open letter on social media to the victim of a rape that occurred while she was lying unconscious—due to a drinking binge that led to her collapsing behind rubbish bins.

When you add to these snapshots to the struggles within your own life, you may well find yourself asking what is happening? Why is life like this? The answer is found in what Adventists call the great controversy.

OVERVIEW OF THE BATTLE

1—God's purposes

We will begin to answer this by considering a text I have found helpful in setting the scene for God's work in the world,

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Romans 8:29)

But how is God's purpose to be achieved?

2—God's plan

Paul explains God's plan for me "to be conformed to the image of his Son happens as I gaze upon the glory of Jesus,

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory... (2 Corinthians 3:18)

3—God's problem

However there is a problem—Satan is working hard to obscure this glory of Jesus by blinding my eyes,

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4)

This blinding explains why people are being shot—even in country lanes where I live, why people have lost all sense of morality, and why people are falling into utter despair. Indeed, it is why we find ourselves struggling with our own

sinful selves. We are in the middle of an intense, cosmic, battle between two supernatural powers where the focus of the battle zeros down to one key issue—the image of God in human beings. It is this battle over the image of God in our lives that I would like to illustrate with some of the insights of the early Adventist pioneers.

THE IMAGE OF GOD & THE GREAT BATTLE

salvation—from the consequences of sin

Summarising the scene I have briefly referred to as the great controversy between God and Satan, WW Prescott refers to three Bible passages:

- **Genesis 1:27** So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
- **Romans 3:23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
- **1 Corinthians 15:49** And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

Prescott then concludes, "These three scriptures bring out these points clearly: Man was created in the image of God; all have sinned, have lost the image of God, and have the earthly image; it is the purpose of God to restore that lost image. Now we are in the process, as it were, of having the image of God restored."

Consequently, AT Jones wrote, "This is the work of salvation, it is to restore the image of God in the soul; to bring to the mind where it will be but the reflection, the outshining, of the righteousness, the thought, of the living God."

This emphasises the biblical perspective that salvation is not simply about me reaching a Heavenly home, but rather that salvation my being saved from the sin that ravages me. As Ellen White again emphasises, "The central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other in the whole book clusters, is the redemption plan, the restoration in the human soul of the image of God."

creation—in the image of God

We have seen how Genesis 1:27 describes how we created in God's image. Ellen White adds, "Man is very dear to God, because he was formed in his own image." She also notes that at creation

man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character" which meant that "his

nature was in harmony with the will of God. His mind was capable of comprehending divine things. His affections were pure; his appetites and passions were under the control of reason. He was holy and happy in bearing the image of God, and in perfect obedience to His will.

the fall and the image of God

But then disaster struck as a deliberate attack against the image of God was planned. AT Jones explained, "they [Adam and Eve] sinned. The glory departed. The image of God was gone. They no longer reflected the image and glory of God, but the image and shame of another."

Ellen White writes how this was not an accident, "the image of God was manifested in Christ, and in the councils of Satan it was determined that He [Jesus] should be overcome." "From the beginning it has been Satan's studied plan to cause men to forget God . . . Satan hoped to confuse the minds of those whom he had deceived that they would put God out of their knowledge. Then he would obliterate the divine image in man and impress his own likeness upon the soul." "Satan was exulting that he had succeeded in debasing the image of God in humanity."

focus of the damage—the mind

But how is the image of God in humans "obliterated" or "debased"? Overall, the focus is on the mind, for it is the mind that distinguishes humans from the rest of creation. To lose control of my mind, and act merely on impulse and feelings, is to be reduced to the level of animal instinct which destroys God's image in me. As Ellen White notes, "It is the true elevation of the mind, not an affectation of superiority, that makes the man. The proper cultivation of the mental powers makes man all that he is."

While the battle is intense and I may make mistakes, God does not allow the destruction of my mind to happen easily,

the mind of a man or woman does not come down in a moment from purity and holiness, to depravity, corruption, and crime. It takes time to transform the human to the divine, or to degrade those formed in the image of God, to brutes, or to the satanic. (Ellen White)

AT Jones concludes, "it is Satan's most determined work to destroy the image of God in man. He would make the intelligence of man, his highest, noblest gift, the most destructive agent, to pollute with sin everything he touches."

two causes of damage

Early Adventist writers described many activities as resulting in the destruction of the image of God, including being "enamoured by fashion", "forgetful of prayer meeting", failure by parents to train their families to focus on godliness, slavery, self-confidence, lack of interest in the welfare of others. But in 700 references to the image of God in the writings of the pioneers, two causes are mentioned the most—1) alcohol, and 2) masturbation.

Alcohol White writes, "man voluntarily places to his lips the draft which debases below the level of the brute him who was made in the image of God." She continues "Reason is paralyzed, the intellect is benumbed, the animal passions are excited, and then follow crimes of the most debasing character" describing how Satan inspires alcohol legislation that "destroys the beings created in the image of God".

Masturbation White's articles on masturbation are printed in 1864, 1870, 1871, and 1889, and includes one pamphlet of over 7500 words addressed to mothers. She describes how the habit "crushes out the image of God, and stamps in its place that of the destroyer".

why jesus came to earth

But within this battle, we are not alone. White writes, "ever before him, Christ saw the result of his mission . . . by giving His life for me, He would restore in humanity the image of God. He would lift us up from the dust, reshape the character after the pattern of His own character, and make it beautiful with his own glory."

APPLICATION

- In what sense do you feel blinded by "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4) and what consequences have you noticed in your life that you need to act on now?

1

LIFE POINT

the great controversy focuses on the image of God in me

2

LIFE POINT

salvation is for me to be restored in the image of God

3

LIFE POINT

the destruction of the image of God begins in my mind

4

LIFE POINT

the reason Jesus came to earth and die was to restore His image in me