

Story of the Development of the “Character of God” Message

by *F. T. Wright*

This explanation was given by Fred in 1974 at the Arizona Camp-Meeting, on Sunday, September 15, in the middle of a study on that theme. I've added a few explanatory notes in square brackets.

I MIGHT pause a moment here to just discuss the story of how I came to understand these great truths. Because they're not new to me so far as the basic concept is concerned.

Twenty two years ago [that would be around 1952], before I learned this message [Fred is referring to the 1888 gospel message], and I was still back in the Seventh-day Adventist church, the Sabbath School Lessons began on the subject of “The Origin of Evil” in this particular quarter. And I was a Sabbath School teacher.

In the book *Early Writings* in that wonderful chapter “The Advent Movement Illustrated”, in the first paragraph, Sister White describes the churches of God as being bound together by cords, and in those churches there were scattered individuals who did have a connection with heaven, even though the message of the first angel, or the everlasting gospel in verity, had not yet reached them. They were still God's faithful people. And while back in that situation still, it says

Early Writings, p. 240:

Beams of light from Jesus, like rays from the sun, were imparted to them. An angel bade me look carefully, and I saw an angel watching over every one of those who had a ray of light.

As I was a teacher in the Sabbath School class back in those days, I found myself being deeply absorbed in the principles involved in the beginning of the great controversy. I found

myself reading with unusual interest the step-by-step development of Satan's thinking, the way in which God worked to respond to that, until I came to understand the *legal* problems involved in this great controversy, because they *are* legal problems. It was a question of the structure of one organization, namely God's organization, over the structure of another organization, which was Satan's substitute organization. It wasn't a battle over the Sabbath, the state of the dead, or those things, although, of course, those things are very, very closely involved and related to this problem.

So I remember teaching the Sabbath School class, and we all gained a great blessing from this understanding. I then recognized that God submitted the proving of His word against the word of Satan, to the demonstration of these two things, working themselves out side-by-side, according to their own individual merits. And that seemed to me a very, very fair proposition on God's part; God's declaration being that His word, and His works would stand any test whatsoever, and could stand upon their own merit without the interposition of special advantageous physical power. Well my soul really thrilled to see that.

Then a few weeks later, we came to the story of the flood. And as I read this, things just didn't seem to agree with the concepts I had learned back there in the beginning of the great controversy. It looked now, as I read the story of the flood, as if God and Christ looked down with increasing anxiety on the way in which things were working out, because down here upon the earth, who was winning all the battles? Satan was. Who was getting the multitudes? Satan was. And things were going on and on until Satan was getting the vote of the entire world, but for these few people, the eight of them, and they were shaky enough weren't they?

Noah, of course, was very solid and firm, and his elder son Shem too. But what about Ham? He showed right after the flood the weakness of his character. And it looked, as I read

the story, as usually understood, that God was saying to his Son:

“Well, our plan isn’t working out too well down there. Satan is getting the advantage, he’s getting the lead, and we’ve just got to step in and halt this drift. Because if we don’t, then Satan will have everybody, and our cause will be lost.”

So, exercising their superior, their mighty creative physical power, God stepped down, wiped out all of Satan’s people, kept just his own alive, and made a fresh start.

That didn’t seem to me like fair play. And if God had acted that way, it would not have been fair play either, would it? God had subjected the whole thing to a fair test, that is, that His word and His works must stand upon their own merit, against Satan’s word and against Satan’s work.

And so I saw a very definite clash of concepts between what God agreed to in the first case, and what He appeared to do down there at the flood. Believe me, I was deeply perplexed about this, and not content until I found the answers. And so I went to God most earnestly, and asked him to reveal to me a consistent picture in this whole arrangement, or this whole battle, as it was fought back there at that time.

I’ll never forget, as long as I live, the day when the answers came through to me. I was working alone on an extension to the Stanmore Church in Sydney. I was bricklaying there on an extra room at the back. No one was helping me, I was working alone. And as I laid bricks, I thought about this problem. I’d lay one brick and think about it, and I don’t know how straight the wall was, because my mind was on other things!

Finally lunch time came, and I sat down to eat lunch still thinking and praying about this problem, and then suddenly there came to mind certain things I’d learned back in College, about how the flood had actually come, and I suddenly saw that God had not sent the flood as man would send the flood.

Instead, God had worked hard to save them from that disaster, and that disaster came, not because God sent it, but because God could not prevent it.

Certainly, of course, He had the physical power to prevent it. God has the physical power to do anything. But while God has the physical power to do certain things, He still cannot do those things because of His nature.

To illustrate: let's think of a Christian young mother who has had a very fine upbringing, a country upbringing, shall we say. And she has a very deep and natural affection for her firstborn child. She loves that child with the intensity of a mother-love. Now think very carefully. Does that mother have the physical power to destroy that fragile babe? Certainly. But could she do it? Impossible. And so God had the physical power to bring the flood. But could He do it? He couldn't, because it was against His character. But at the same time, He couldn't prevent it, because that would be against His character too.

So twenty two years ago, that principle began to unfold to my mind, and twenty two years ago I came to learn that God was not a destroyer. And then this message followed, and somehow those concepts remained more or less in the background. They didn't seem to surface as something very important for this point of time.

And as you know, year after year, as I've come to camp meetings, we have not taken up that subject. Maybe one or two of you might remember my discussing it more or less in conversation, but never particularly as a matter of a message for this particular moment and this particular hour.

Well, last year, somehow I had a very definite compulsion to put those thoughts into print, and of course many of you have read those thoughts in the subject entitled, "Does God Destroy?" But even then, I didn't think it was a very large or a very consequential subject to even preach about.

I went to the German camp meeting, and I had no thought nor intention of actually giving those studies at the German camp meeting. But before I got there, there was a brother in Europe who reads English quite well, as well as German. And this brother had become deeply disturbed by the thoughts presented in this particular series. So much so, that he thought I was in very, very deep error.

And so before the camp meeting convened, he asked to have an interview with me, and for three hours he read to me a long list of statements, and told me, flatly and plainly, that my concept in regard to this was totally wrong, and if I was going to present this at the camp meeting, then he was going to go home straight away. That's how strongly he felt about it.

Of course Europeans do have very, very strong feelings about their convictions. They don't have that more desirable attitude that would say:

“Well, let's wait and see, and study this very carefully and pray about it, and maybe we have some wrong ideas and conceptions about the matter.”

Well, he did go home before the week was out, and took the family with him, which was very disappointing and sorrowful to us. And I'm still working with this family and hope that they will yet see this light. The rest of the European believers are rejoicing in it, because after camp was over, I spent some time up in some of the other cities, and studied with the larger groups over there. They really came to rejoice in these great truths, as we are here, and as the folk did over there in Arkansas.

But when this brother took such an attitude against this particular presentation, then I went, as I always do, to the Lord, and made it a very, very special matter of prayer, asking God to enlighten my mind to reconcile all these apparently impossible statements. Like the one that God said to Moses, “tell the Levites to slay all those idolaters,” and when Elijah

took the priests down to the brook and slew them, and when they stoned the Sabbath-breakers, and they stoned Achan, and these various other problems that we have already discussed in the past.

And as I was searching for an answer, I came across certain statements in the book *Selected Messages* in regard to the wrath of God being poured upon Christ. And then I read in *The Great Controversy* that the mystery of the cross explains all other mysteries. And suddenly this subject leaped into my mind to a position of major consequence.

And I suddenly saw that we had come to that place where, facing as we do the last great conflict, when, as we read here a moment ago, the character of Satan will stand fully developed in all his followers, and the character of God in all of His followers, that through the followers of God there would be given to the world that lightening of the whole earth with the glory of God. And I saw as I'd never seen before, that unless we, as God's people in this hour, have stripped away from our minds all those old wrong concepts and ideas about God, those ideas of thinking of God as if he was another man like ourselves; unless those were stripped away from our minds, we would enter the final conflict unfitted for that all important work which must then be done.

And so it seems very significant to me that this great truth should be more or less dormant in our teaching over twenty two years of understanding of it, not of course as fully as we now understand it. But at this very time, when we've had the background that we have, that this message can come in with a significance that it does come in.

And so as we've been seeing then, there will be but two classes down at the end of time. Every character will be fully developed, and all will show whether they've shown the side of loyalty or that of rebellion.

And I'd like to say, that I'm very impressed personally with

the fact that God seems to know best just when to bring to us this particular truth and that particular truth, so we can learn things in their right order and at the right time, for the right time.

After all, who is preparing the people for this last great work? Am I doing it, or is God doing it? God is doing it. He is the teacher, and like a good teacher, a perfect teacher, He chooses the lessons that we must learn today, or in this particular camp meeting or in the next particular camp meeting, and so on down the line.

So, we then have come to a most significant step in our understanding and in our experience.