

## **How God Won His Case**

Perception of a “Juror”

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God may you “win your case when you go into court!”

Goodspeed’s dramatic translation of Romans 3:4 matches Paul’s use of David’s prayer in Psalm 51:4. The apostle has raised the question, does the lack of faith among God’s privileged people mean that God Himself cannot be trusted? “By no means! God must prove true, though every man be false; as the Scripture says, ‘That you may be shown to be right in what you say, and win your case when you go into court.’”

If God had not been accused, there would have been no need for Him to defend Himself. And just as the charges had been heard throughout the universe, so the answers must be publicly made known. When Daniel described a convening of the heavenly court, he emphasized the open presentation of the evidence. A hundred million watched as “the court sat in judgement, and the books were opened” (Daniel 7:10, RSV).

As sinners needing salvation, we naturally tend to be preoccupied with what God has done to save us, so that we may be regarded as righteous when our cases come up in the judgement. But the Bible speaks of a prior concern of far greater importance—the confirmation of the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God Himself.

Some find it hard to believe that the Infinite One would tolerate—let alone encourage—the questioning of his inscrutable ways. But the book of Revelation and many other parts of Scripture describe an age-long conflict over the divine character and government that has involved the whole universe—even to the extent of war up in heaven (see Revelation 12:7-17).

Unless God wins this war and reestablishes peace in His family, our salvation is meaningless. Who would want to live for eternity in a warring universe? Moreover, the conflict is over God’s own trustworthiness, and until serious questions concerning His character have been convincingly resolved, what sound basis is there for our faith in Him?

What would it mean for God to win this war? His enemies are His own children. To destroy them would be no victory for a loving Father, but an agonizing loss. Think of the eternal void Lucifer will leave in God’s infinite memory!

If the conflict were merely over power, how easily God could demonstrate His superiority. But even the demons already acknowledge this, and in their distrust of so powerful a God they “tremble with fear” (James 2:19, GNB).

The controversy is over a far more subtle issue: Who is telling the truth, God or the brilliant leader of His Angels?

The former Lightbearer, now called Satan or the Devil, meaning “accuser” or “adversary,” first succeeded in persuading vast numbers of his fellow angels that God was unworthy of their trust (see Revelation 12:4, 9). Then when the conflict was extended to our newly-created planet, he accused God of lying to our first parents and insinuated that he had been arbitrary, vengeful and severe in His harsh restriction of their freedom.

If Satan’s charges are sustained, we would be foolish to place our trust in such a deity. Has God responded to these accusations? Do we find His answers a sufficient basis for our faith?

The Bible—all of it—is a record of the lengths to which God has been willing to go to convince us of His trustworthiness. During the past forty years, I have enjoyed the privilege of leading groups through all sixty-six books more than 130 times. With each successive reading it becomes more convincingly apparent that God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be. On the contrary, He values nothing higher than our freedom and our freely given love and trust—toward Him and toward each other. Such qualities cannot be commanded or produced by force. Nor does God ask us to trust Him as a stranger. Instead He first reveals Himself, that we may come to know Him and decide for ourselves whether we find Him worthy of our trust.

This is why, instead of destroying His enemies, God took His case into court. The supreme Creator of the universe humbly submitted His own character and government to the scrutiny and investigation of His creatures.

How did God set out to win His case? Did He resort to bribery or intimidation? Satan accused God of buying loyalty in the case of Job. Did He expect the court to accept His claims of trustworthiness simply because of who He is—the powerful Creator of the universe? Did He bedazzle the court with miracles? Did He threaten to destroy anyone who voted against Him? Would that have helped Him win His case? What kind of victory in court did He desire?

Most of all, since the issue is a question of trust, did God manipulate the jury by miraculously planting faith in their hearts so they would all vote in His favor? Would you trust a God who would so control the minds of His children or be satisfied with such artificial faith?

There are no shortcuts to trust. Claims of trustworthiness prove nothing. The devil can make such claims. Hitler claimed he could be trusted, and history showed the folly of believing mere promises and claims without confirming evidence. When Satan questioned the genuineness of Job's faith, God did not settle the matter by divine pronouncement. Instead, he permitted the painful demonstration of the facts in the case. This is God's way of establishing the truth.

Even though God has been falsely accused, there is only one way to meet the charge. Only by the demonstration of trustworthiness over a long period of time and under a great variety of circumstances—especially difficult ones—can trust be reestablished and confirmed.

This is why God in so “many and various ways” demonstrated the truth about Himself “to our fathers” through the long centuries of Old Testament history (see Hebrews 1:1, RSV). Finally, He sent His Son to live among us. And the way Jesus lived, the way He treated people, the things He taught about His Father, and most of all the unique and awful way He died were the clearest revelation of the truth about the trustworthiness of God the universe will ever see or need.

What a price God has been willing to pay to restore and confirm trust in His family! And the costly demonstration was not only for the benefit of us sinful mortals. The whole universe has been involved. Christ did not die for sinful men alone. He shed His blood for the sinless angels, too! For they, too, needed the faith-confirming message of the cross.

Paul explained this to the believers in Colosse. “Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through His Son's death on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven”

(Colossians 1:19, 20, GNB). It is through the meaning of the cross that the war that began up in heaven is finally brought to an end and eternal peace is made sure.

Twice in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote of God's purpose to bring his whole family back together again in unity and harmony (see Ephesians 1:10; 3:10). As Jesus said before His crucifixion, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me" (John 12:32, GNB).

The 1611 first edition of the King James version has Jesus saying that He will draw "all men." But later editions carefully indicate by the use of italics that the word "men" has been supplied. Paul's larger understanding of the involvement of the onlooking universe in the meaning of the cross supports the translation of the Good News Bible, "I will draw everyone."

Ellen White emphatically agrees that "the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth...but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe." Then she quotes John 12:32, boldly and correctly leaving out the limiting word "men" (PP 68, 69).

In the same chapter in Romans where Paul calls for God's victory in court, he cites the supreme evidence upon which God bases His defence and wins his case. God sacrificed Himself in His Son to provide convincing demonstration of the truth. As Paul explains, "God showed Him publicly dying as a means of reconciliation to be taken advantage of by faith. This was to demonstrate his own righteousness, for in His forbearance God had apparently overlooked men's former sins. It was to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, to show that He Himself is righteous and that He sets right those who trust in Jesus" (Romans 3:25, my own translation).

God had told the truth in Eden. He had not lied as Satan charged. Sin does result in death. But no, it is not torture and execution at the hands of a vengeful God. God did not lay a hand on His Son, either in Gethsemane or on Calvary. He "gave Him up" as He will give up sinners in the end. And they will die. And God will cry, just as he wept over rebellious Israel, "How can I give you up, how can I let you go?" (See Hosea 11:8; cf. Romans 1:24, 26, 28; 4:25)

Was it worth such a price to clear up any misunderstanding about sin and its consequences and how God is involved in the eternal death of His unsavable children? Why was it so important to God that His children should not serve Him from fear of torture and execution?

Some of God's own misunderstanding people demonstrated the terrible answer. The universe watched in horror as scrupulously devout observers of the Sabbath tortured Jesus to death in God's name—then hurried home to keep holy yet another seventh day, to show that they were indeed God's faithful and obedient people.

How could they be so religious and so cruel? Was it because they worshipped a god who would do the very same thing? Cruel persecutor Saul served such a god until he met Jesus on the Damascus road. Is there a warning here to Christians who worship a god who would miraculously keep sinners alive in the final flames until they have been sufficiently tortured before execution?

Three highly privileged disciples were invited to watch the awesome experience in Gethsemane, but they were too sleepy to pay attention. Only one of them went out to Calvary to see and hear for himself God's costly answers to the questions in the great controversy.

But the evidence was not wasted on the rest of the universe. Ever since Christ cried out on Calvary, “It is finished,” the loyal angels have never tired of assuring God that He has won their everlasting love and trust (see Revelation 4:8; 5:11-14). On the basis of the evidence God had overwhelmingly won His case. And He had won it with evidence that could stand up under investigation for eternity! Only here on this planet are there any remaining doubts about the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God.

The open way in which God sought to win His case is itself persuasive evidence of His trustworthiness. He even warned against accepting questionable evidence, especially signs and wonders used as a substitute for truth (see Deuteronomy 13:1-3). This warning, of course, invited people to look carefully at the miracles God Himself performed.

God also warned of the danger of accepting too quickly the claims of religious leaders that their messages came straight from God; they could be lying (see 1 Kings 13). This in turn invited people to be cautious in accepting claims and promises that seemed to be made by God Himself.

On the road to Emmaus, God further demonstrated His concern that important decisions be based on weight of evidence rather than the authority of someone’s mere assertions, no matter who he may be. As Jesus talked with the two disciples, He disguised Himself until He had interpreted the Scripture and had led them to an intelligent faith in His life, His character, His mission to earth, and His death and resurrection. Clearly, He wished the truth to be established in their minds, not because it was supported by His personal testimony, but because the teaching and predictions of the Old Testament, agreeing with the facts of His life and death, presented unquestionable evidence of that truth (see Luke 24:13-35).

That the Sovereign of the universe, who has the power to run His creation any way He wishes, should humbly choose to win our agreement on the basis of adequate evidence is unbelievable—but true! God has clearly shown it to be His preference, and history has demonstrated the reason why.

God even prefers that we regard ourselves not as His servants but His friends. As Jesus explained in John 15:15, the reason for this incredible offer is that the servant simply does what he is told. No reasons. No explanations. Just unquestioning submission and obedience. It is an honor to be God’s faithful servant, but God prefers the intelligent cooperation of understanding friends.

God was honored by the confidence of Abraham and Moses when—with all due reverence—they ventured to question His purposes and plans. As can be expected of good friends, they were concerned about God’s reputation. And God was proud to acknowledge them in the Bible as His trusted friends.

How could a God like this fail to win His case—at least with me and you!