

## 6. Struggling with All Energy

**Biblical material:** Genesis 32; Matt. 5:29; John 16:5-15; Col. 1:28, 29; 1 Peter 1:13.

### Quotes

- God does not command us to live in hair shirts and chains, or to chastise our flesh with scourges, but to love Him above all things and our neighbor as ourselves. *Saint Charles of Sezze*
- Spiritual things are against the stream; heaven is up hill. *Richard Sibbes*
- Your first task is to be dissatisfied with yourself, fight sin, and transform yourself into something better. Your second task is to put up with the trials and temptations of this world that will be brought on by the change in your life and to persevere to the very end in the midst of these things. *Augustine*
- Our journey is uphill, with a dead body upon our backs, the devil doing what he can to pull us down. *Philip Henry*
- God has not called us to fumble through life. *Stephen Olford*

### Questions

What is the energy we are supposed to use here? What is the fighting all about? How do the concepts of the great controversy help us understand this? How do we best understand the battle, and what victory is? What is our role in the conflict? Is this the same as working out our own salvation, with fear and trembling? How does God fit in here?

### Discussion / Comment

Sunday's lesson speaks helpfully of the great controversy and how God never forces or compels. While God keenly wishes to help us, he is subject to his self-imposed "rules of engagement" in his dealing with his created beings, especially after sin. God values freedom as a defining principle in his universe, and maintains our free will, our ability to choose.

That's not to say that he wants to make things difficult for us, to make us "struggle for salvation" as some have concluded. It is a free gift—but we have to want it. Our struggle is not with God, but with ourselves—that we are truly convinced we want God and his help. As self-referenced beings, we are reluctant to accept our hopeless state. We think we can fix ourselves.

Not is this "let go and let God" in the sense of denying our own responsibility. We are not to give up our individuality, our power to think and to do. In fact that is the precious gift God has spent so much on, and who are we to deny that. What he is looking for is our conscious choice to live according to truth and right, and to accept all the help he is able to give at our request.

So two extremes to avoid here. 1) that we struggle in our own strength and 2) we make the struggle all about God "brainwashing" us. The great controversy is over God's use of power—whether he exercises his might in appropriate ways. Extreme number 2 agrees with Satan that God is a dictator. Extreme number 1 agrees with Satan that God can't (or won't) help us. Our role is to demonstrate that God is goodness personified, that he struggles together with us in the battle for truth and right, that he is completely unselfish, wanting the best for all his created beings.

So what of Jesus' command to self-mutilation (Matt. 5:29)? This radical statement states the extreme desire of God that we not allow some aspect of our lives to ruin everything. How can

we say God does not care when Jesus says such serious things. God is anxious, desperate (to use human words) to save us from the sins that will kill us, eternally. So the fight that we fight is the good fight—the fight to be good, to allow God to make our thoughts good, to live in the only way that makes any sense in a good universe—good! And to repeat—the fight is not to persuade God, or even to militarily defeat the Devil, but to deal with our own desires that lead us away from good.

When Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord, was God really attacking Jacob? Or was Jacob fighting his own demons, his internal tendencies to go his own way? The whole story sounds strange if we imagine God wanting to fight and inflict pain on one of his children. Yet God here demonstrates the lengths he is willing to go to (and the misunderstandings that can develop) in order to save us from our destructive tendencies. God is definitely an interventionist—doing what it takes to put us in a situation that will help us. In the end Jacob realizes who he is and his deep needs, and will not let the Lord leave until he blesses Jacob. Finally he understands, and clings to the one who he fought against.

So like Jacob, recognizing that he is fighting against the only one who can truly help, let's cling to our loving Lord and accept his blessing...

### **Ellen White Comments**

Let us arouse! The battle is waging. Truth and error are nearing their final conflict. Let us march under the blood-stained banner of Prince Emmanuel, and fight the good fight of faith, and win eternal honors; for the truth will triumph, and we may be more than conquerors through Him who has loved us. The precious hours of probation are closing. Let us make sure work for eternal life, that we may glorify our heavenly Father, and be the means of saving souls for whom Christ died.--Review and Herald, March 13, 1888. {ChS 77}

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” What does that mean? The work must be carried on, and this little world was chosen in which to carry on this work. All the universe of heaven was interested in the great work. Every world that God has created is watching to see how the battle between the Lord of light and glory and the powers of darkness will end. Here is Satan, who has been seeking with all his power to shut out the true character of God, so that the world could not understand it, and under a garb of righteousness he works upon many who profess to be Christians, but they represent the character of Satan instead of the character of Jesus Christ. They misrepresent my Lord. They misrepresent the character of Jesus every time that they lack mercy, every time that they lack humility. {1888 125-6}

Just before us is the closing struggle of the great controversy when, with “all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness,” Satan is to work to misrepresent the character of God, that he may “seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.” If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called to be the depositaries of His holy law and to vindicate His character before the world. Those to whom has been committed a trust so sacred must be spiritualized, elevated, vitalized, by the truths they profess to believe. Never did the church more sorely need, and never was God more solicitous that she should enjoy, the experience described in Paul's letter to the Colossians when he wrote: We “do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” {5T 746}

