

## 10. The Cross Brings Atonement

*Matt. 26:37, 38; 27:46; Mark 14:33, 34; Luke 22:40–44; John 19:28–30.*

### Quotes

- Theological thinking should not be abandoned to the masters of elusiveness. *Rik Torfs*
- Christianity is a religion about a cross. *Leon Morris*
- Freed to draw by its own power, the cross remains the magnet of the souls of men. *Kenneth Cragg*
- ...by a sort of legal fiction, Jesus was treated as what he was not, in order that we might be treated as what we are not. This is the best device, according to the prevailing theology, that the God of truth, the God of mercy, whose glory is that he is just to men by forgiving their sins, could fall upon for saving his creatures! *George MacDonald*
- At the cross God wrapped his heart in flesh and blood and let it be nailed to the cross for our redemption. *E. Stanley Jones*
- This one event of the cross of Christ is a final revelation both of the character and consequence of human sin and of the wonder and sacrifice of divine love. *Alan Stibbs*
- Thus was the Cross of Christ, in St. Paul's day, the glory of Christians; not as it signified their not being ashamed to own a master that was crucified, but as it signified their glorying in a religion which was nothing else but a doctrine of the Cross that called them to the same suffering spirit, the same sacrifice of themselves, the same renunciation of the world, the same humility and meekness, the same patient bearing of injuries, reproaches and contempts, and the same dying to all the greatness, honours, and happiness of this world, which Christ showed on the Cross. *William Law*
- He who has surrendered himself to it knows that the Way ends on the Cross—even when it is leading him through the jubilation of Gennesaret or the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. *Dag Hammarskjöld*
- The way of the cross leads home. *Jessie B. Pounds*
- It was the experience of the disciples who knew Jesus both before and after the Resurrection, and the conviction which they communicated to others, that laid the foundation of faith. This faith, once given, proved to be—like the Person who gave rise to it—essentially self-authenticating. And ever since, the Church has looked to the Cross, a symbol of weakness, as its unique source of power in preaching the Gospel, its authority both to teach and to preach has been of this kind. *Nick Earle*
- Without the resurrection, the cross is just another piece of bad news. *Chuck Scriven*

### Summary

That the cross brings atonement is not in question. The issue is over how, and what exactly is achieved! For depending on what is perceived to be the problem, the cross as a means of atonement can be seen in many different ways. Add to this the challenge that

we have become familiar with the cross as a symbol in our society. To that extent the cross has lost its capacity to shock—for in the ancient world the cross was an object of shame, not of glory. Then again the cross has been given other interpretations that owe much to pagan understandings, and is devalued and misunderstood as a result. So in this most important area of salvation, we need to look again and to ask “what does the cross really mean? What does Jesus’ death actually achieve? And how does this relate to us, as well as the on-looking universe? Nor must we forget that without the resurrection, the cross says nothing. For many men were crucified, many also suffered this ignominious fate. Yet only one is our saviour, only one makes atonement possible. While the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross says so much about God, it must be set in the context of his life, both before and after, and what this also demonstrates about God and his answers to the issues in the cosmic conflict.

### **Questions**

How does the cross bring atonement? What questions does the cross answer? How does Jesus’ death on the cross bring us back to God and achieve reconciliation? Did the Cross change anything in God? What does the cross do beyond our own salvation? How do the angels view the cross? Why is it important to see the cross as only one aspect of the process by which God achieves the atonement? Is it true that “all that is necessary is that Jesus should be offered as a sacrifice? If not, why not? How is God in Christ, reconciling the world to himself? What aspects of God are seen in Jesus, especially as he dies on the cross? What dangers are there in turning the cross into symbols and pendants? How would you explain the cross and its meaning?

### **Crosses**

My grandmother was a faithful believer. I have many memories of her saying her rosary and kissing her crucifix. I loved my gran, and I admired her faith. I would never ever wish to speak badly of her. She followed what she believed to be right, sincerely and truly. I can still remember her saying her prayers under her breath, and kissing that wooden crucifix with its silver image of Christ pinned to it. No mistaking her devotion. But why? Why did she do it? What did it all mean? The cross, what does it really mean?

You see lots of crosses in the world today. They decorate all kinds of churches as the common symbol of the crucified Lord. And I have no reason to speak against that. Though the cross symbol may come from a pagan, just like Easter itself, it is the meaning that you put into the symbol that counts.

I once received the most scathing letter from someone who believed it was his responsibility to go around denouncing all churches that had a cross on them, for this was the sign of the pagan God Tammuz and was associated with heathen Babylon and all that. Some of what he was saying was true—but that doesn’t take away from the value of the cross as a symbol of Christianity—at least, not for me!

Then there are other crosses. Little gold crosses that people wear around their necks. Little silver crosses that people wear on bracelets. Little enamelled cross that people wear as brooches. I often wonder about those crosses. Are they worn because the person is

superstitious, and the metal cross is a good luck charm? Like the images of St. Christopher people carry with them to protect them while traveling? Do such things bring you good luck? Should a Christian trust in good luck charms, even if it is in the shape of a cross? You answer!

Then there are crosses that really are used as magic devices. You can get rid of vampires by holding a cross out at them. Did you know that? Oh, a clove of garlic will do just as well. Or a silver bullet, a holly stake or two. Or if you want to exorcise demons, you take along your cross. Or if you're a clergyman at a heretic burning, you hold out a cross to the person in the flames with the hope that they will change their minds. On and on—the cross used in so many ways that hardly speak well of why Jesus had to die! Think of it. Even crosses on your Hot Cross Buns! Meaning what? Always ask the meaning!

Most of all the cross is God's most complete answer to all the questions he's been asked. The cross is full of meaning. Not just some ritual, or ceremony, or system. God on the cross speaks to us. Look, and listen! The cross:

1. Explains how much God loves us.
2. Is the most complete demonstration of the nature of God.
3. Shows us what sin really is, and what it does. The Devil said we wouldn't die. God came to show that sin does result in death. He experienced death as an inherent result of sin. Christ on the cross is God proving that sin kills you!
4. Reveals the Devil for what he truly is—a liar from the beginning. It proves God right and the Devil wrong. For the Devil is the one who kills God.
5. Shows to the entire universe that God is right, and true, and trustworthy. He is not as the Devil has said, but really is good and true and loving. The cross proves that without a shadow of a doubt. No longer can anybody believe the Devil might be right when he says God is hostile and unloving.
6. Reveals that God upholds his own laws, that there is no other way to live. Without God, you die, which is why Jesus cried out: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me'? God can't change his laws, because they are an expression of his very character. His laws are for the good, and never for evil. The cross upholds all his laws by showing they can never be altered without altering God himself!

All the universe watches. They got the message of the cross. For though the loyal angels trusted God, they need to have their trust confirmed. The only way God could get what he wanted—loving trust—was to show himself loving and trustworthy, and to demonstrate that the Devil was completely wrong in all his charges against God. The cross settles the Great Controversy between God and Satan throughout the universe. What went wrong in the first place? We distrusted God, and trusted the Devil. So what needs to be changed? Our rebellious, distrustful attitude to God—which is what sin is. That's what the cross does. That's what it means. By his death, Jesus answers our questions and proves himself totally trustworthy. However:

The paganizing of Christianity in the great apostacy [sic] in the early ages of the church's history brought in a heathen concept of the

character of God and a heathen idea of sacrifice, applying it to the sacrifice on the cross. This corrupted and transformed the whole idea of atonement and of mediation...

In this view, the blood of Christ means the death of Christ, a death made necessary by the demand of the Father for satisfaction for the sin of man. Man sinning deserved death. Before God could admit him to pardon and salvation, we are told, His wrath must be appeased, or His sense of justice must be satisfied. So Christ died, shed His blood, **in the place of man**. All who accept this death by faith as for them are admitted to pardon and then, by some divine casuistry, are accounted pure and free from sin, or let off from the damnation that was their due. Unhesitatingly, we pronounce this whole concept false, unscriptural, and unlike God.

How could God show His justice by killing the innocent for the guilty?... George E. Fifield, *The Water of Life* (Plainfield, NJ: Recorder Press ?date), p.92

### **Answers from the Cross**

Jesus makes a number of references (Matt. 16:21, 17:23, 20:19; Luke 9:22, 13:32, 18:33) to his coming death by crucifixion in order to prepare his followers for what is to happen. It is surely true that he lived his life “in the shadow of Calvary.” That is not to say he was morbid, or had some kind of “death wish,” but he recognized where things would lead. As part of the ongoing controversy, his self-chosen vulnerability would expose him to the worst that the Devil could throw at him. In such a context his death was inevitable.

However that is a different perspective to that which believes his death was mandatory for our salvation. If Christ could have, through his mission to reveal the character of the Father, won all back to love and trust, would he still have “had to die”?

All this depends on the perspective of what Jesus’ death accomplished. For some it changed the heart of the Father from wrath to love so that it enabled the Father to be able to forgive us. But scripture makes clear it was not in order to engender love in the Father that Jesus came, but *because* of the love the Father already had for us. Jesus’ statements regarding his approaching death must not be seen as fatalistic or mechanistic, the demand of God for blood-sacrifice. It was not God who demanded such a death; rather it was caused by Satan and human agents working in concert for his destruction, as the Bible makes abundantly clear.

When Jesus in Matthew (20:18,19) clearly describes what is going to happen—even down to his resurrection on the third day—is this part of some pre-determined plan that God has arranged, or is it a description of God’s foreknowledge? Again, the answer depends on your view of God, what he is trying to accomplish, and what he needs in order to save.

Jesus knew his end, and yet still worked for all those around, even those who were crucifying him. What does this say about the nature and character of God? How did the on-looking universe learn more about God from the life and death of Jesus?

For the Cross is the deepest, strongest and best answer from God to everyone. How much he does love, how far he is willing to go, how badly he wants each and every one of his created, thinking beings. A personal God made personally known:

“No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” (John 1:18 TEV).

You want to know what God is really like? You want to know who he is? Then look at Jesus, and you’ll find your answer. “Whoever sees me sees also him who sent me,” said Jesus. “I and my Father are one.” And again: “Now you have known me...you will know my Father also, and from now on you do know him and have seen him.” (John 12:45, 14:7 TEV). We know him best and see him best on the Cross.

In London’s National Gallery you can find many representations of Christ on the Cross. Altar pieces, miniatures, great panoramas: all depicting this central event of Christianity. As I considered one particularly sentimental portrayal, I heard one bystander remark to his friend:

“It’s all very moving, but why did he do it? Why did Christ die? What was it for?”

To which came the swift reply: “Oh, it’s just like the pagan sacrifices. This was the blood payment of guilt to appease an angry god.”

Overcoming my native British reserve, I ventured to suggest that on the contrary it was God dying there on the cross, and that by doing this God as Jesus was the Answer.

To which I received the dismissive reply that “If Jesus is the Answer, I don’t understand the Question,” as the two moved off, giggling.

Sad—but people still don’t see it. They look to the cross with admiration for many reasons: as a magic formula to gain credit with God, as a talisman to ward off evil spirits, even as a lucky charm to be worn around the neck. They miss the whole point—and even Christians have got the Answer wrong!

Unless we understand *what* God was showing us on the cross, then we shall never understand him and his true nature. The cross is the divine answer to all the criticisms, charges, and misrepresentations that have been hurled at God down through the ages. *God’s truth is there.*

Hard it is, very hard,  
To travel up the slow and stony road  
To Calvary, to redeem mankind; far better  
To make but one resplendent miracle,  
Lean through the cloud, lift the right hand of power  
And with a sudden lightning smite the world perfect.

Yet this was not God's way, Who had the power,  
But set it by, choosing the cross, the thorn,  
The sorrowful wounds. Something there is, perhaps,  
That power destroys in passing, something supreme,  
To whose great value in the eyes of God  
That cross, that thorn, and those five wounds bear witness. *Dorothy L. Sayers*

### **Attraction, Repulsion**

The crucifixion is both attracting and repelling. In recognizing the wonderful love of God, we are drawn to the cross. But in its harsh reality, its cruel suffering, it rightly repels us. It is here that we see the consequences and answers to the universe-wide rebellion; the results of sin; and the lengths God will go, not just for our salvation, but to restore harmony throughout the universe. Here we see God as he really is. Read again the biblical material that recounts the crucifixion: Matt. 26:37, 38; 27:46; Mark 14:33, 34; Luke 22:40–44; John 19:28–30.

What do we see? The king of the Jews, as Pilate said? Yes, and yet from the Jewish leaders point of view, no. He is the despised, rejected king. Is he the victim of Roman brutality, the national leader cruelly executed to warn others? Yes from Pilate's perspective perhaps, and yet again no. Is he, as the mockers around the cross sarcastically say, the Son of God? No, not for them, and yet yes!

The issue is always about who Jesus is. For if he is truly God, then—but if not... As the mockers recognized, perhaps unconsciously, the fundamental point is Jesus' divinity: "He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" Matthew 27:43 NIV. So why didn't God rescue him? Why did he not make a dramatic gesture right there, and cow the mockers through a display of blazing power and glory?

Why didn't God rescue Jesus? Because Jesus is God, and this was his choice. Not because he had to go through the motions of making a sacrifice to placate the Father, but because only through choosing to do this could God answer the questions over his nature and character, could he end the domination of sin and evil, and could he save us from our guilty selves.

"It is finished." It is hard for us to know the intonation with which these words of the dying Christ were spoken. If they came as the sufferer's sigh of relief, they must also have been the worker's glad cry of achievement. Everything had been done that could be, man had been offered a sight of God as He really was. For those of us who believe that, in seeing Jesus, we see God, the Cross is not a coarse framework of blood-stained wood, but the most precious emblem of man's dearest hopes; it is the great pledge which we sorely need, that love is stronger than hate, grace than sin, life than death. *H. R. L. Sheppard*

When Jesus gives the heart-rending cry from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” what does this tell us? The natural consequence of sin, the fatal results of separation from God, the bitterness of loss. Remember it is God there on the cross—as Ralph Turnbull says, “This was no mere quotation of the Psalm, but an expression of intimacy with God.” When Jesus finally dies, saying “It is finished,” what was finished? The work he came to do, which was to reveal the Father. Not simply some ritual sacrifice, but the conclusive proof of who God truly is. At the very end, Jesus prays his last prayer, committing himself once again into the safe and trustworthy hands of his caring Father.

The word “atonement” means *at-one-ment*. Sin had brought misery, and misery had brought a misunderstanding of God’s character. Thus men had come to hate God instead of loving him; and hating him, the one Father, men also hated man, their brother. Thus, instead of the one family and the one Father, men were separated from God and from each other, and held apart by hatred and selfishness. There must be an atonement.

An atonement can be made only by God so revealing his love, in spite of sin and sorrow, that men’s hearts will be touched to tenderness; and they, being delivered from Satan’s delusions, may see how fully and terribly they have misrepresented the divine One, and so done despite to this Spirit of his grace. Thus they may be led, as returning brethren, to come back to the Father’s house of blissful unity.

The atonement is not to appease God’s wrath, so that man dare come to him, but it is to reveal his love, so that they *will* come to him. It was not Christ reconciling God unto the world, but God in Christ reconciling the world to himself. It is nowhere said that God needed to be reconciled to us; he says, “I have not forsaken you, but you have forsaken me.” And Paul says, “I beseech you in Christ’s stead, Be ye reconciled to God.” It was this question that needed to be answered: How can it be that God is our Father, and that he is love, when we suffer so much, and oftentimes so unjustly, and yet no voice breaks the silence, no Father’s touch soothes our sorrow? The question was to be answered by God, through Christ, breaking the silence, and through him healing the sick, and raising the dead, prophetic of the time when, Satan’s power being broken, all tears shall be wiped away.” G. E. Fifield, *God is Love* (Chicago, Theodore Reese, 1897). pp.100-1

### **Not legal**

It is frequently asserted that the main problem is our legal standing before God. From such a perspective the Cross is seen as the mechanism to deal with our guilt and consequent sentence, borrowing concepts from the courtroom. So the argument runs like this:

“We are in a State of Serious Legal Infraction with God and so we need to be declared Not Guilty. The essential objective is Forensic Justification That’s what Jesus provided in his Vicarious Atoning Sacrifice. Through his Propitiation of Divine Wrath and Satisfaction of Justice he provided Expiation and Penal Satisfaction and consequently we receive from him both Imputed and Imparted Righteousness.”

But in reality the problem of fallen humanity is not so much a question of being in legal difficulties with God, but that as a result of the rebellion of sin our attitude toward God is one of suspicion and distrust. Consequently this attitude has to be removed, which can only be done by reconciliation of man to God, which is the true meaning of atonement— at-one-ment. Note particularly that this reconciliation is not of God to man, as some have maintained. Rather, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.” (2 Cor. 5:19).

For all those words mentioned above are not necessary for understanding salvation. Justification, sanctification, propitiation, expiation... Jesus didn’t use them, nor did Paul nor any other New Testament writer. They mostly come from Latin, and tend to confuse rather than explain the issue. There are plenty of simple honest-to-goodness short words that will do much better in explaining the truth about God and his mission to save us. The danger is of becoming confused, so that the good news of God’s salvation is no longer easily understood:

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:3 NIV).

So why not try to make it simpler? When Jesus spoke, the common people heard him gladly. The consensus was that “No one ever spoke the way this man does” (John 7:46 NIV). He used simple terms and familiar illustrations to speak the deep things of God.

Talking to Nicodemus, Jesus didn’t say “Except you accept the Reformationist concepts of Forensic Justification and Substitutionary Atonement, you cannot see the kingdom of God.” No. Simply “Except a man be born again...” Simple, yet so profound.

So instead of saying “justify” with its heavy legal overtones, why not “set right”? Instead of “sanctify”, why not “kept right”? Those were the actual meanings of the words Jesus (and later Paul) used. To make them into technical terms tends to destroy their vitality—they lose their power to make an impact on us personally. You can sum up God’s salvation in words of one syllable. You don’t need polysyllabic circumlocutions! Try this:

“Jesus died and rose to show us what God is like, and to set us right and keep us right with God. In this way he wins us back to love and trust him. And in the end he will save all those who have shown their trust in him.” *Every word a monosyllable!* Sounds too simple? It *is* simple. The practice may be hard, and we get in the way of what God wants to do for us and in us. But the truth is so clear and easy to understand. Why make it difficult?

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3 NIV emphasized.) Making God known was Jesus’ mission: “No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” (John 1:18 NIV.) Jesus said to Thomas: “If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” (John 14:7 NIV). And at the end of his prayer for his disciples, Jesus declares his mission accomplished: “I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and I myself may be in them.” (John 17:26 NIV).

This notion of substitutionary atonement leaves us with the irony that God’s chief concern seems to be to keep the books balanced. Over against one side of the ledger that records our sin must be another side that says the penalties have been paid. The books must be balanced. This theory, again, gives us a picture of God that looks more like a judgmental tyrant. It winds up making God responsible for Jesus’ death. God is a God who must get even (p. 141). Atonement is not something that God has done for us in the sense that God has made Jesus take our place so that the books would be balanced. Atonement is something God does within us (p. 142). “I believe that we can understand the cross only if we are willing to see that Jesus did not die to appease an angry God. Jesus did not die to satisfy some abstract penalty for sin.”(p.143). R. Kirby Godsey, *When We Talk about God, Let’s Be Honest* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 1996)

Many... see the traditional view of the cross as fostering a picture of God as a child abuser. God sends his only begotten Son into the meat-grinder of earthly humiliation, suffering, and execution so that his huge divine appetite for retribution may be finally satisfied. John 19:11 and Acts 2:23 clearly pin on God this violent attack on Jesus. “Against such an image of God the revolt of atheism is an act of pure religion.” Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Jesus Against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 155, in Ronald F. Marshall, *Preaching Against the Cross*, <http://www.elca.org/lp/againstcr.html>

No distinction then, between Father and Son. Both are equally loving and self-sacrificing, working together for the salvation-healing of humanity. To set one against the other is to divide the Trinity, and to deny the very gospel that Christ came to demonstrate: for Christ is the revelation of God the Father. And Christ is, as the old creedal formula says, very God of very God.

In this way God dying on the cross answers one of Satan’s persistent charges—that God is an autocratic tyrant who demands sacrifice and self-denial from his created beings, but is not willing to do so himself.

This is the reality of the atonement, the way back to God through his dying to win us to love and trust him once again. The cross is not meant to be some kind of mystic symbol or magic talisman that can ward off danger, defeating vampires or whatever on the same level as garlic, silver bullets and holly stakes. The cross of Christ has no more impact than the crosses of the two robbers if it is seen as just an object. As always, it is the *meaning* that must be asked for.

The cross must therefore be seen as God's greatest self-disclosure, the fullest revelation of his true nature and character. God on the cross is God as he really is.

### **Irony**

It is the height of irony that the Son of God is sentenced to death for being God. The charge of blasphemy and its consequences reveal far more than the religious leaders might have intended. For in this they clearly show what kind of God they believe in, and it is not the God revealed by Jesus. So perhaps they are "right," for they seek to destroy the God they don't believe in...

Judas' betrayal of Jesus can also be seen as a rejection of an unwanted God. The God Judas wanted was not the one revealed by Jesus either. In trying to force Jesus' hand, Judas finally discovers that the person he had followed was not to be manipulated, that he could not decide Jesus' agenda, and that in trying to use Jesus to his advantage he doomed himself to disaster. It does not take much thought to see how often we try to "exploit" God in this way, to make him in our image, and in so doing miss the real truth about God.

### **From Cross to Resurrection**

We cannot truly understand the cross except in the light of his resurrection. All too often, focusing on elements of sacrifice, we miss the whole point. Jesus died, *but then he rose again!* Without the resurrection, what would the cross be but a magnificent gesture? The resurrection gives the cross meaning and certainty, for without the resurrection there is no future.

A major criticism of many "theories of the atonement" is that they leave out the resurrection. The emphasis is on making blood-payment, on providing sacrifice, on moral influence, on being a legal substitute and so on. But these images cannot contain the transforming, amazing demonstration of resurrection. They limit the act of God to transaction and payment, or "mere" moral appeal, and can be as dry as bones, as lifeless as a dead body. But the resurrection makes the atonement pulse with life, confirms the animating power of God, and guarantees the present and future presence of God. *Now that's atonement!*

The resurrection of the dead together with Jesus makes the point. They are the "firstfruits of the kingdom," the practical proof that God intends to raise all his trustworthy children. As Paul comments, without the resurrection, our faith would be in vain.

If there is no future with God, what would be the point of this life? Not that we seek reward, but that we want to be with our loving Lord. And that's the guarantee provided by Jesus' resurrection, also demonstrated by the (limited) resurrection of the dead together with Jesus. Now it all makes sense! "I have many things to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now," Jesus told his disciples before the crucifixion.

So what difference does it make to believe in a resurrected Lord? Like the early apostles, who preached Jesus and him crucified, yet stressed that "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." For "God raised him from the dead.... God has raised this Jesus to life." Acts 2: 36, 24, 32 NIV. The message was not one of crucifixion alone, but that *Jesus came back from the dead!* Only in seeing the whole of Jesus' life, death and resurrection do we gain the complete picture of God that he wants to reveal to us. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead..." 1 Corinthians 15:19, 20 KJV. No cross without the empty tomb!

In Jesus' glorious resurrection we see the blinding flash of divine energy, the absolute proof that God can deliver on his promises. This is the real truth, the final all-inclusive answer: God revealed, shown for what he truly is: "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6 NIV).

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### Atonement study 10: EGW quotes

They were taught... to trust to works of their own to atone for sin. Long pilgrimages, acts of penance, the worship of relics, the erection of churches, shrines, and altars, the payment of large sums to the church—these and many similar acts were enjoined to appease the wrath of God or to secure His favor; as if God were like men, to be angered at trifles, or pacified by gifts or acts of penance! {GC 55-6}

...the people of Israel had not understood the lesson. Many of them regarded the sacrificial offerings much as the heathen looked upon their sacrifices, —as gifts by which they themselves might propitiate the Deity. God desired to teach them that from His own love comes the gift which reconciles them to Himself. {DA 112}

While God has desired to teach men that from His own love comes the Gift which reconciles them to Himself, the archenemy of mankind has endeavored to represent God as one who delights in their destruction. Thus the sacrifices and the ordinances designed of Heaven to reveal divine love have been perverted to serve as means whereby sinners have vainly hoped to propitiate, with gifts and good works, the wrath of an offended God. At the same time, Satan has sought to arouse and strengthen the evil passions of men in order that through repeated transgression multitudes might be led on and on, far from God, and hopelessly bound with the fetters of sin. {PK 685-6}

Bent on self-pleasing, men came to regard God as such a one as themselves—a Being whose aim was self-glory, whose requirements were suited to His own pleasure; a Being by whom men were lifted up or cast down according as they helped or hindered His selfish purpose. The lower classes regarded the Supreme Being as one scarcely differing from their oppressors, save by exceeding them in power. By these ideas every form of religion was molded. Each was a system of exaction. By gifts and ceremonies, the worshipers sought to propitiate the Deity in order to secure His favor for their own ends. Such religion, having no power upon the heart or the conscience, could be but a round of forms, of which men wearied, and from which, except for such gain as it might offer, they longed to be free. So evil, unrestrained, grew stronger, while the appreciation and desire for good diminished. Men lost the image of God and received the impress of the demoniacal power by which they were controlled. The whole world was becoming a sink of corruption. {Ed 75-6}

In the atonement the character of God is revealed. The mighty argument of the cross demonstrates to the whole universe that the course of sin which Lucifer had chosen was in nowise chargeable upon the government of God. {GC88 500}

The death of Christ upon the cross made sure the destruction of him who has the power of death, who was the originator of sin. When Satan is destroyed, there will be none to tempt to evil; the atonement will never need to be repeated; and there will be no danger of another rebellion in the universe of God. That which alone can effectually restrain from sin in this world of darkness, will prevent sin in heaven. The significance of the death of Christ will be seen by saints and angels. Fallen men could not have a home in the paradise of God without the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Shall we not then exalt the cross of Christ? The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise

of bliss. All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God.  
{5BC 1132}