

At One with God

11. Atonement: God's Gift to the Universe (Atonement and the Cross of Christ—4Q 2008)

Rom. 8:34–39; 1 Cor. 15:16–18; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 7:25; 1 Pet. 3:21, 22; 1 John 1:9.

Quotes

- They say first, God must punish the sinner, for justice requires it; then they say he does not punish the sinner, but punishes a perfectly righteous man instead, attributes his righteousness to the sinner, and so continues just. Was there ever such a confusion, such an inversion of right and wrong! *George Macdonald*
- Some try to interpret the plan of salvation in a very legal way suggesting that what has gone wrong is that we have broken the rules. And the law demands that God execute us for breaking the rules. But Jesus died so that somehow God could justly forgive us even though we have broken the rules. How can you claim that justice has been done when the most righteous and innocent Man who has ever lived dies so that all the guilty can go free? *A. Graham Maxwell*
- If God is what people say there can be no one in the universe so unhappy as He; for He sees unceasingly myriads of His creatures suffering unspeakable miseries—and besides this foresees how they are going to suffer during the remainder of their lives. One might as well say, “As unhappy as God.” *Mark Twain*
- God loves us the way we are, but too much to leave us that way. *Leighton Ford*
- All gods are better than their conduct. *Mark Twain*
- We major in spiritual sentiment and virtually dismiss the importance of spiritual content. *R. Scott Richards*
- When we know what God is, we shall be gods ourselves. *George Bernard Shaw*
- The basis of your religion is injustice. The Son of God the pure, the immaculate, the innocent, is sacrificed for the guilty. This proves his heroism, but no more does away with man's sin than a school boy's volunteering to be flogged for another would exculpate a dunce from negligence. *Lord Byron*
- The cross is nothing less than monumental injustice: Jesus is punished undeservingly by a God who is simply unfair. *Victor Shepherd*
- In Christ we see God for us. *Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki*

Summary

The way in which God brings back the universe into “oneness” with him (atonement) must be one that does not violate the very laws God chooses to abide by—the expression of his character. So, for example, to act in an unjust way to achieve justice is unthinkable as far as God is concerned. The very moral and ethical fabric of the universe would be destroyed if God was not true to such fundamental principles. Consequently for God to do anything that is manifestly unfair negates all the good that God is! This is most important when it comes to ideas of the atonement—for as so many have observed, how could anything terribly unjust fulfill concepts of justice? So it is completely wrong to see

God as demanding the sacrifice of an innocent on behalf of the guilty, for example. Jesus makes this abundantly clear—that he is not trying to persuade a hostile God to be good to us, but that God loves us himself. Otherwise we end up splitting the Godhead, setting one element against the other—the Father against the Son. Quite the contrary—God is placing himself of trial, demonstrating the truth about himself, wanting to be completely transparent and open in all his dealings with his created beings. He is not looking for some mechanism to allow him to forgive, but rather always working for the other, looking to seek and to save, to answer the charges laid against him, and to bring all back into at-one-ment with him.

Questions

What would it say about the Father if the Son was pleading with him to save us? What is the meaning of John 3:16? How do we rightly explain Jesus' current ministry in heaven? What is really going on in intercession? Who is the real Accuser, and what are the issues? Is it OK for God to break his own laws? How can we misunderstand the true nature of the atonement? Why did Jesus say he would **not** plead for us? What eventual result is God working towards? How does the great controversy play out in the ideas about the atonement? Is it possible to misunderstand God and his intentions, and if so what is the result? Why is God so interested in "open government"? How are we involved in the vindication of God and his principles? How would it be if God himself compromised these principles—or is it OK if God does so because he is God?

It's for you

My father had an interesting way of calling us to the phone. After shouting the name of whichever family member was needed, he'd bawl out, "It's for yoo-hoo!" *It's for you.* Identifying the person that the action/contribution/gift is for, like a label on a Christmas present, to make sure it gets to the intended recipient.

God labels his gifts for us, making sure we know that he has us individually in mind. Most especially when he gives his greatest gift—of himself.

All too often we miss the point, because we've heard the words too often. "Christ died for us," we intone, and immediately a host of theological baggage arrives ready to be unloaded, unpacked, and unwrapped. Talk about needing a code book, for there's much that has to be deciphered. "In these words we have the incarnational mystery of substitutionary and proleptic atonement," says the scholar, preoccupied with defining and attributing and specifying. Not that any of that is essentially wrong; it may just get in the way. The problem may even be that we misunderstand what is really happening, and get the whole issue the wrong way round.

It's for us. That's the essential message. The direction of his act is us-ward, not God-ward. Christ did not die for God, to fix things there. He died *for us.*

It's interesting how often we miss this fundamental point. We can be so fixated on making sure we get the facts to fit our theoretical notions of how God makes salvation

possible that we miss the actual sense of the message. The meaning of the words is lost in the theological noise, the cognitive static.

So let's look again at the texts. (Italicized for emphasis).

- You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ *died for us*. Romans 5:6, 7 NIV.
- For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He *died for us* so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 1 Thessalonians 5:9, 10 NIV.
- For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one *died for all*, and therefore all died. And he *died for all*, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who *died for them* and was raised again. 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15 NIV.

So the first question is what does this "for" mean? Just because our theological minds have been attuned to understand "in place of" or "on behalf of" does not mean this is the original meaning. In fact, far clearer meanings of "for" here would be "because of," or even "to." The "for" is in our direction, it is "towards" us. In the same way when we give a gift and say "it's for you" as we hand it over, God is directing the gift of himself to us.

It would make little sense to give a gift and say "it's for you" and mean "it's on behalf of you." Yet that is the "usual" theological meaning imposed on these verses. Let's look at more evidence:

- I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ *died for nothing!*" Galatians 2:21 NIV.

On behalf of nothing? No, "for" meaning "reason" or "consequence"—nothing was accomplished. It makes little sense to read this text any other way. Christ was not "substituting" for nothing. Rather, it simply means that his death was *for* no purpose.

- For Christ *died for sins* once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. 1 Peter 3:18 NIV.

Again, "for" here is to be understood as "because." Christ died as a consequence of sins—being made sin who knew no sin, the righteous being made unrighteous and experiencing the inherent result of sin—separation from God, ruin and death. There is no hint of "replacement"—that Jesus died on behalf of us or our sins.

- Christ *died for our sins* according to the Scriptures. 1 Corinthians 15:3 NIV.

Dying for our sins—dying because of the effect that sin has, in other words. Why is it so difficult to read such verses and understand the word “for” in its normal sense of “because of”? Take another simple example:

- When Achan son of Zerah acted unfaithfully regarding the devoted things, did not wrath come upon the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who *died for his sin*. Joshua 22:20 NIV.

He died as a consequence of his sin—sin was the causative factor. Where is the usually-assumed intent of “for” meaning “in place of”? “Replacing”? “Fixing it”?

No, on the contrary—Jesus is willing even to experience the consequences of our own sins. He becomes a curse *because of us*:

- Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse *for us*, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” Galatians 3:13 NIV.

Sin kills

A major message of Jesus’ death is that *sin kills*. Sin has an inherent consequence. As God told the pair in the Garden, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.” Genesis 3:3 NIV. Did Eve and then Adam die immediately after they touched the fruit? Did they die from eating the fruit? Not directly. It was not a contact poison, a toxic substance. In fact, Eve describes the fruit very differently: “the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom.” Genesis 3:6 NIV. So the fruit itself is not necessarily to blame.

If, however, you believe the result of sin is a direct and imposed penalty of God—“you touch that fruit, I’ll kill you”—why did the pair not die on the spot? It didn’t happen that way. No, God is not the executioner. He did *not* say he would kill the sinner. He simply states that sin kills, and the sinner dies. Sin’s inevitable outcome—death and non-existence—is the opposite of the Life-giver. While God has frequently punished his children for sinful disobedience, and his discipline surely is not pleasant, to make God into the Divine Slayer who metes out the ultimate sanction of the death penalty is to turn our heavenly Father into a vindictive tyrant of the worse kind.

You reap what you sow. “The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Galatians 6:8, 9 NIV.

Let’s be clear here. The payment is intrinsic, it is automatic. It is not an imposed penalty, but a simple consequence of action.

“Sin pays a wage, the wage is death.” Romans 6:23 Phillips.

“For the wage paid by sin is death; the gift freely given by God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23 New Jerusalem Bible.

“For the wages paid by Sin are death; but God’s free gift is the Life of the Ages bestowed upon us in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23 Weymouth’s New Testament

Note here that God gives gifts—he doesn’t pay wages! This is not some kind of recompense for services received; rather it is God’s gracious gift to those who love him, those who wish to identify with him and be with him. Nor is it some kind of reward for good behavior, but comes from the heart of him who is love. Here we must avoid any notion of some bargain or contract. In fact Christian thinking has been damaged by this “curse of the contract,” trying to bargain with God to get some kind of deal. Like the woman in the hospital who asked me if she gave everything to the church whether God would heal her. That’s not the way it works, and reflects terribly on our picture of God.

For it reveals a highly-flawed understanding of who God is and how he works, and is the result of dangerous misconceptions regarding our relationship with him. It’s not a contract with obligations. Not some business deal—as Jesus illustrated in his parables. Remember the story of the men working for different lengths of time in the vineyard, and yet all received the same pay? In God’s kingdom we’re not paid according to merit or work done, but we are given the free gift of eternal life.

God is not Hostile

For God is not hostile. He is not the Enemy. God is on our side, wanting to give us all his good gifts. Nor is he trying to solve some internal conflict in himself, paying himself off through some mechanism that satisfies himself! There’s no need to imagine one attribute of God fixing it for another attribute.

The essence of the good news is that God is not against us. He is not a vengeful Deity intent on vindictive punishment, an angry and unsympathetic divine Being who is antagonistic towards us. If we should even believe this just a little, then we fall into the Devil’s trap and believe his picture of God.

So what is the truth?

“What, then, shall we say in response to this?”—the saving, glorifying intentions of God for us. “If God is *for us*, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up *for us all*—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” Romans 8:31, 32 NIV.

The fundamental message as demonstrated by Jesus is that God is on our side. He is not opposed; in fact he places himself squarely on our side, with us. He is *for us, for us all*.

Paul in Ephesians 2:1-9 NIV spells it out for all to know:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love *for us*, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

We know what we’re like. Hardly loving or lovable. And certainly not doing, saying, or thinking the right things. A group of sinful, evil rebels who are a long way from being God’s friends. So far gone that we’re identified as being dead in our wickedness. But God, because of his great love *for us* makes us alive through his rich mercy and graciousness. God gives his incredible gift of eternity with him, his gracious transforming of our lives, his saving resurrection from our sin-caused death—because of who he is. Not because of who we are—and not from anything we can do to help ourselves—it is all the gift of God. Who of us can boast?

God with Us

“Whoever is not against us is *for us*,” said Jesus in Mark 9:40. In the same way, God is on our side. With us. God with us. Emmanuel, God made flesh and dwelling among us, full of grace and truth. This is God showing how *much* he is *for us*.

Philip wonders about this God, and thinks it would be essential to see him as he is. “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough *for us*,” he says. We will be convinced if we can really know for sure that God truly is for us.

Wondering how more clearly he can reveal God, how more plainly he can show the nature of the Father, Jesus asks, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

For in total truth, Jesus reveals this “for us” God, stating bluntly that if we’ve seen him, we’ve seen the Father (see John 14:9).

He is the one who demonstrates the truth about God so we can understand it: “Christ Jesus, who has become *for us* wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” 1 Corinthians 1:30 NIV. .

Sometimes, like Peter, we worry about what is coming to us, what the benefit will be *for us*. “Peter answered him, ‘We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be *for us*?’” Matthew 19:27 NIV. In other words, what will we possess? What is the *benefit* for us? The answer is in Luke 1:69 NIV: “He has raised up a horn of salvation *for us* in the house of his servant David.” The horn of plenty, the abundant salvation that God provides for us. Not as a “stand-in,” in the “replacement” sense of “for.” God is not there “instead of” us. He is there “because of” us. He is truly *for us*.

So we can wait in confidence for the future, the achievement of salvation in its fullest sense, for we know the kind of God who promises. “We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself *for us* to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” Titus 2:13, 14.

He gave himself *for us* so that we could be *for him*—to be changed into the kind of people we would want to be. Not in some theoretical way of having goodness imputed to us when we really are not, but being truly changed, wishing to live in the only way that makes sense—God’s way. We are changed by the giving God who gave himself for us, and continues for all eternity to give himself to and for us.

For if God had not done this, we would never have known, never have discovered the real truth about our “for us” God. But now we know, and can respond in total confidence:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life *for us*... And so we know and rely on the love God has *for us*.” 1 John 3:16; 4:16 NIV.

God is *for us*. God is for *us*.

Pleading?

“Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.” Hebrews 7:25 NLT. “Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us.” Romans 8:34 NLT.

So if God is primarily concerned with us, then the whole concept of Jesus achieving atonement by interceding with God needs very careful explanation. Note particularly the very clear words of Jesus: “In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf.” John 16:26 NIV. Not pleading the Father. So who is he pleading with/for? Is this about persuading a reluctant God to do what he would not do otherwise? Surely not!

Even right at the heart of Christ’s atoning work we can say wrong things about God. If we see Jesus as our friend who is trying to convince God to be nice to us; if Jesus is the protective barrier that stands between us and an angry God—what are we saying about God the Father? That he doesn’t love us as much as Jesus; that he’s against us; that he has to be persuaded to forgive us and so on... Or if we stress the blood of Jesus in a certain way, we

can make it appear that God is bloodthirsty; that he demands Jesus' life before he'll forgive us, that he can only be appeased by this sacrifice, that he thunders; "I need somebody to die before I'll change my mind!"

This is not speaking well of God—in fact this is a pagan view of God, one who demands human sacrifice to appease the terrible gods! Doesn't God the Father love us as much as God the Son? We need to be very careful what we say about the Sanctuary, for in saying good things about the Son we may be misrepresenting the Father!

God is not condemning us. The accusations come from the accuser of the brethren, Satan himself. That's why Jesus speaks for us—to counter the charges of the devil. "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." Romans 8:34 NIV. And note here that this is part of the wider issues in the great controversy, and this intercession is not trying to persuade God the Father to be good to us. God is always working for us, (let's not split the Trinity!) Both Father and Son 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 very God of very God, as the old credal formula states.

In this way Christ dying on the cross answers the charge 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—most significantly the meaning of the cross as part of the great controversy. The other thinking beings of the Universe needed the demonstration of the cross too—revealing that there are issues far beyond our little world. Of course that depends what you believe are the issues in the great controversy.

This is an essential question, for the answers of the cross depend on what you believe are the issues. If it is a question over power, then the cross is seen in that way. If it is about legality, then that's the way you understand the cross. If it is an issue of trustworthiness, then the cross will be the answer to that. Of course, not all the issues are valid, and consequently some answers will be wrong. That's why it is critical to look again at what the Devil's charges were.

For was the atonement just a skilful way to get around the sin punishment idea? That the life of the sinless Son of God would balance out all the other forfeited lives of the guilty?

Lifted Up before the Whole Universe

John 12:32 identifies exactly what Jesus was doing. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me." (Note the word "men" is supplied here in the KJV).

His death on the cross draws—not just us, but the whole on-looking universe. Why? Because we all need to see and know and understand the truth about God in contrast to the Devil’s misrepresentation. Only through the demonstration of God as he is are we drawn to accept God, and only then can we accept the salvation he has to offer. Unfortunately, however much we might want salvation, if we do not see God in a positive light then we will not want to accept eternal life with such a God. That’s why the cross is so important—far more than fixing our salvation or adjusting our legal status, God is winning us back to loving trust, healing us from the damage of sin, and fitting us for an eternity in the presence of our loving Lord. Otherwise the cross doesn’t make any sense!

While we cannot minimize the suffering Jesus experienced on the cross, nor must we elevate this aspect and say this is what the cross was *for*. The over-concentration on the passion, the “atoning suffering” if you will, makes it appear that Jesus through his agony was satisfying something in God. If that is what God appears to be requiring, are we not buying into the Devil’s picture of God? No, it was the separation, the sense of the broken relationship, that caused the agony... Nor did God the Father cause this. For the Father suffered along with the Son. God is on the cross, showing his love for the Universe, *for us*.

Here again we see the openness of God revealed, a revelation to the whole universe of the character of our loving Lord. God is faithful and just (1 John 1:9), and gives us his blessing because we are united with Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Because of God’s victory, because Jesus is indeed raised from the dead, then we have life too, life everlasting! (1 Cor. 15).

No Condemnation

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1 NIV. Surely one of the most reassuring statements in the whole of the Bible! We *do* feel that we’re condemned, and most of all by our own consciences. The sense that we live under condemnation—of the law, of others, of our own selves—is a terrible burden. God liberates us from that burden of guilt, not by saying we’re not guilty when we are, but by transforming us from guilty rebels into trustworthy friends.

Most of all the good news is about the goodness of God. An awesome, condemnatory judge is hardly a picture that wins us, or draws us towards our heavenly Father. In all the talk about the judgment, which can seem onerous and overbearing, it is important to remember the truth expressed by Jesus in John 5:24 NIV: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” Trusting faith in Jesus means no condemnation, an assurance also reiterated by Paul.

However it is also essential to recognize the decision-making aspects of judgment. All are judged on the decisions they have made, and on that basis a decision is rendered. Without such an examination of the evidence there can never be a true and definitive conclusion. This is why, rightly understood, judgment can be such a blessing. It means that there is an

end, a conclusion, a resolution—especially to the existence of sin and disharmony in God’s universe. For while we concern ourselves to a great extent as to how judgment affects us, the far greater aspect of judgment is in relation to God. C.S. Lewis’ book title “God in the Dock” provides a vivid picture—for it is God that is on trial before the whole universe. He is the one who in the judgment answers the charges raised by the Accuser, and that is the real point at issue. God is the one being accused and condemned, and the same Accuser condemns us. But just as God demonstrates that the charges are baseless, that the condemnations are false, so he will also vindicate his friends who identify with him, following his way that they also agree is good and true and right. So then there really is no condemnation, despite the attempts of the Devil to slander and defame. For:

Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us. Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, “For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”) No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:34-39 NLT.

God’s Gift—or Dishwasher Prizes

A report in Britain’s *Daily Express* newspaper caught my eye. It told the sad story of housewife Clare Smith who had bought her first ever packet of dishwasher detergent for her new machine. Not realizing it, she had in her hand the winning packet that contained a tablet with a golden ball on top, a prize worth 200,000 British pounds (\$390,000).

“I read the instructions and popped one of the tablets in the dishwasher,” she says. “I noticed it had a gold ball in it but thought that was just how they were made.”

Noticing the next day the regular tablet just had a blue ball, she looked at the box and saw the prize competition. Horrified, she realized she had washed a fortune down the drain. “I couldn’t sleep that night so I got out of bed and took the dishwasher apart looking for the golden ball,” she recounts. “We’ve even checked the drains.”

All to no avail. The golden ball had gone, vanished, irretrievably lost. Thinking of what she had done, and what that small fortune would have meant to her and her family, she laments, “I couldn’t believe I’d been so stupid.”

It doesn’t take much to think of some spiritual parallels—they are all too obvious. You can draw your own conclusions. But as a spokeswoman for the company stated, “It is

very sad if she has done this, but I'm afraid there's nothing we can do. It is up to people to check for the golden ball before they put it in the dishwasher. Without it they can't claim the prize."

Paul writes, "One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13, 14 NIV)

After telling the story of the treasure and the pearl, Jesus asked his followers, "Have you understood all these things?" Clearly this really is something we should be thinking about—especially in regard to God's free gift of himself to us that brings us back to him.

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose," wrote missionary Jim Elliott, who died sharing the gospel. The question is whether we recognize the true pearl of God's gift of atonement, or whether we are more concerned with dishwasher prizes.

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Atonement study 11: EGW quotes

We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again. By choosing to sin, men separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing, and the sure result is ruin and death. {FLB 84}

...the enemy of good blinded the minds of men, so that they looked upon God with fear; they thought of Him as severe and unforgiving. Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice,--one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgments upon them. It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men. {SC 10-11}

But the atonement for a lost world was to be full, abundant, and complete. Christ's offering was exceedingly abundant to reach every soul that God had created. It could not be restricted so as not to exceed the number who would accept the great Gift. {DA 565-6}

In order to fully realize the value of salvation, it is necessary to understand what it cost. In consequence of limited ideas of the sufferings of Christ, many place a low estimate upon the great work of the atonement. The glorious plan of man's salvation was brought about through the infinite love of God the Father. In this divine plan is seen the most marvelous manifestation of the love of God to the fallen race. Such love as is manifested in the gift of God's beloved Son amazed the holy angels. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This Saviour was the brightness of His Father's glory and the express image of His person. He possessed divine majesty, perfection, and excellence. He was equal with God. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (Col. 1:19). . . . {AG 160.2}

The death of Christ on the cross of Calvary is our only hope in this world, and it will be our theme in the world to come. Oh, we do not comprehend the value of the atonement! If we did, we would talk more about it. The gift of God in His beloved Son was the expression of an incomprehensible love. {OHC 45}

Our little world is the lesson book of the universe. God's wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which "angels desire to look," and it will be their study throughout endless ages. Both the redeemed and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song. It will be seen that the glory shining in the face of Jesus is the glory of self-sacrificing love. In the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which "seeketh not her own" has its source in the heart of God; and that in the meek and lowly One is manifested the character of Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto. {DA 19-20}

The cross will be presented, and its real bearing will be seen by every mind that has been blinded by transgression... Every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy will then have been made plain. In the judgment of the universe, God will stand clear of blame for the existence or continuance of evil. {DA 58}