

THE MEANING OF THE ATONEMENT: ELLEN WHITE'S UNDERSTANDING

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“Hanging upon the cross Christ was the gospel...”
(6BC 1113)

Atonement—more than legal

The need for a proper understanding of the atonement is a recurring theme in Ellen White's writings. While she does make extensive use of traditional terminology in describing why Jesus died, her perception of this vital truth goes far beyond the reiteration of terms such as *appeasement*, *propitiation*, *expiation* etc. In assessing the true meaning and implication of the reconciliation of man to God brought about by Christ's life, death and resurrection, Ellen White implements the insights of the Great Controversy viewpoint to help understand what questions the cross answered and what problems it solved.

As a consequence she is not satisfied with repeating formulas or re-stating dogma. What is essential in her thought is the *meaning* of why Jesus died. She rejects the ceremonial and ritual view which understands the cross as purely some kind of legal transaction, a mere judicial act of crediting the heavenly balance sheets. Rather she frequently describes the atonement in what might be described as “medical terminology,” speaking of healing, cure, remedy and so on. In so doing she is less concerned with the concept of judicial pardon for legal infraction but with divine healing of the damage sin has caused. Thus:

The atonement of Christ is not a mere skillful way to have our sins pardoned; it is a divine remedy for the cure of transgression and the restoration of spiritual health. It is the Heaven-ordained means by which the righteousness of Christ may be not only upon us but in our hearts and characters. Letter 406, 1906. (6BC 1074).

God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which he sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. Mount of Blessing, 114.

In this she is repeating God's desire that the law should not be an external corrective but an inward determinant, as Jeremiah also expressed. 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 to 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, as Ellen White well knew, speaking of “the remedial sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who is our atonement—at-one-ment with God.” 6BC 1077. 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).

Christ's death shows us God's great love for man. It is the pledge of our salvation. To remove the cross from the Christian would be like blotting out the sun. The cross brings us

near to God, reconciling us to him.... Through the cross we learn that our Heavenly Father loves us with an infinite and undying love, and draws us to him with more than a mother's yearning sympathy for a wayward child. Review and Herald, April 29, 1902.

Because of love, not to induce love

Forensic theories of the atonement have tended to result in the drawing of a distinction between the Father and the Son, in which the latter in some way is perceived as placating God the Father's hostility and persuading him to grant legal pardon to those for whom the Son pleads. In seeking to speak well of Christ, the Father has frequently been disparaged, no doubt unintentionally. Some have even spoken of the sacrifice of Christ as being the propitiation by means of which God the Father is induced to love us. Ellen White will have none of this:

The atonement of Christ was not the cause of God's love, but the result of that love. Jesus died because God loved the world. The channel had to be made whereby the love of God should be recognized by man, and flow into the sinner's heart in perfect harmony with truth and justice. Review and Herald, September 2, 1890.

The Father loves us, not because of the great propitiation, but He provided the propitiation because He loves us. Christ was the medium through which He could pour out his infinite love upon a fallen world. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." God suffered with His Son, in the agony in Gethsemane, the death of Calvary; the heart of Infinite Love paid the price of our redemption." The Home Missionary, April, 1893 (Questions on Doctrine, 676-677).

The atonement of Christ was not made in order to induce God to love those whom He otherwise hated; and it was not made to produce a love which was not in existence; but it was made as a manifestation of the love that was already in God's heart, an exponent of the divine favor in the sight of the heavenly intelligences, in the sign of worlds unfallen, and in the sight of a fallen race.... We are not to entertain the idea that God loves us because Christ has died for us, but that He so loved us that He have His only-begotten Son to die for us. Signs of the Times, May 30, 1893.

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 very God of very God:

God Himself was crucified with Christ; for Christ was one with the Father. The Bible Echo, August 6, 1894, (5BC 1108).

God the Father does not remain aloof and unmoved as the Son dies. He is there, watching in agony. He suffered too:

What a love it is that appeals to fallen men! [John 3:16 quoted]... Well did the disciples understand this love as they saw their Saviour enduring shame, reproach, doubt, and

betrayal, as they saw his agony in the garden, and his death on Calvary's cross. This is a love the depth of which no sounding can ever fathom. As the disciples comprehended it, as their perception took hold of God's divine compassion, they realized that there is a sense in which the sufferings of the Son were the sufferings of the Father. Youth's Instructor, December 16, 1897. (Also That I May Know Him, 338).

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.

Satan had accused God of requiring self-denial of the angels, when he knew nothing of it himself, and when he would not himself make any self-sacrifice for others. This was the accusation Satan made against God in heaven; and after the evil one was expelled from heaven, he continually charged the Lord with exacting service which he would not render himself. Christ came to the world to meet these false accusations and to reveal the Father. Review and Herald, February 18, 1890.

Christ's self-sacrificing love is revealed upon the cross. He gave all He had, and then gave Himself, that man might be saved. Testimonies Vol. 4, 80.

Atonement: God's self-disclosure

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.

Pardoning, redeeming love is brought to view in Christ Jesus. Satan had misrepresented the character of God, and it was necessary that a correct representation should be made to worlds unfallen, to angels and to men... in Christ we behold the character of the Father, and see the pitying tenderness which God exercised for fallen man, giving his only begotten Son as a ransom for the transgressors of the law. It is in beholding the love of God that repentance is awakened in the sinner's heart, and an earnest desire is created to become reconciled to God. Review and Herald, March 9, 1897.

In the atonement the character of God is revealed. Great Controversy, 501.

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.

As you near the cross of Calvary there is seen love that us without parallel. As you by faith grasp the meaning of the sacrifice, you see yourself a sinner, condemned by a broken law. This is repentance. Selected Messages, Vol. 1, 343.

Never before was there such a general knowledge of Jesus as when He hung upon the cross. He was lifted up from the earth, to draw all unto him. Into the hearts of many who beheld that crucifixion scene, and who heard Christ's words, was the light of truth to shine... they saw the meaning of Christ's mission. MS 45, 1897. (5BC 1137).

It is growth in knowledge of the character of Christ that sanctifies the soul. To discern and appreciate the wonderful work of the atonement, transforms him who contemplates the plan of salvation. Review and Herald, August 26, 1890.

The way in which God restores harmony and reconciles his rebellious children back to loving trust is the message of the cross for us. Without it mankind would remain in the darkness of ignorance and doubt, believing the lies of the Devil about the character of God, thinking him to be hostile and cruel, determined to destroy all those who do not cringe in fearful obedience to his arbitrary laws. The cross is God's answer to all the accusations that Satan has levelled against him. Yet there is more. The death of Jesus is the graphic demonstration to all of what happens to those who refuse to accept his offer of reconciliation. Not as a threat of punitive retribution, but a warning that the wage that sin pays is death, that without God life is impossible. In his agony of separation from his Father, Jesus cries out to all the world "Sin will kill you."

Beholding Jesus upon the cross of Calvary arouses the conscience to the heinous character of sin as nothing else can do. It was sin that caused the death of God's dear Son, and sin is the transgression of the law. Review and Herald, November 22, 1892.

God the Executioner?

The Devil had told Adam and Eve "You will not surely die." God on the cross proves the Devil to be a liar—that sin does indeed result in death. He also answers an even greater question: Is it God who kills? Was it the Father who killed the Son on the cross? No: it was sin itself.

As one is drawn to behold Jesus uplifted on the cross, he discerns the sinfulness of humanity. He sees that it is sin which scourged and crucified the Lord of glory. Mount of Blessing, 9.

Such an important concept must not be overlooked. God (as Father) was not executing God (as Son) in order to satisfy himself or some abstract principle. Sin has its own intrinsic consequences of death and self-destruction. Christ died the sinner's death and:

We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings the punishment upon himself.... 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. Letter 96, 1896 (1 Selected Messages, 235).

God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. Great Controversy, 36.

Christ is ready to set us free from sin, but He does not force the will; and if by persistent transgression the will is wholly bent on evil, and we do not desire to be set free, if we will not accept His grace, what more can He do? We have destroyed ourselves by our determined rejection of His love. Steps to Christ, 34.

God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself. Christ's Object Lessons, 84.

The woes of a lost world broke His heart and crushed out His life on Calvary's cross. Great Controversy, 651.

It was not God! Sin broke Christ's heart with its awful consequences that drew the agonizing cry from his lips as he realized the separation sin caused: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Sin is self-annihilation; it carries its own seeds of death which will bring about that bitter harvest of eternal separation from God, the source of life and being. All this Christ endured to show to us that what God had said was really so, and to persuade us to come to him that we might have life. God does not want abject servitude but willingly-offered love and admiration. God is not a God of force, and if we persist in rejecting us, he ultimately will let us go, crying as he did over Israel: "How can I give you up; how can I let you go?" (see Hosea 11). But if that is the case, then we should not blame God for the consequences of our selfish, sinful choice.

God does not compel any one to love him and obey his law. He has manifested unutterable love toward man in the plan of redemption... If we refuse such love, and will not have him to rule over us, we are working our own ruin, and we shall sustain an eternal loss at last. God desires a willing service of our hearts.... It is only in the light of Calvary's cross that we can estimate the value of our salvation. Review and Herald, February 14, 1888.

Satan unmasked

Through the cross God does much more than deal with us and our problems. God cannot deal with us in isolation from the wider context. The arch-deceiver, Satan himself, is very much involved. In the blazing light of the cross of Christ, the Devil sees himself revealed in all his wickedness. His deceptions and disguises are torn away, for God incarnate has proved himself true. Satan's true nature is unveiled for all to see.

When Jesus died on Calvary, men and angels beheld the malignity of Satan, and the love of God for a fallen world. Review and Herald, July 12, 1892.

One of Satan's greatest charges against God was that his system of government was unfair, above all that his laws were arbitrary and unjust, and should be changed. Ever since his fall Satan has been attempting to deny God's laws and change them. But God's laws are an expression of God's very nature and character, and are consequently as unchangeable as God himself. To deny his laws God would have to deny his nature. To prove this essential truth is another reason for the cross. Not

that God is hard and inflexible in his laws—on the contrary, his laws have always been for the benefit of his created beings. God’s laws merely reflect truth and right, summed up in his nature: God is love.

Consequently:

There is no argument in favor of the unchangeable character of God’s law, so forcible as that presented in the cross of Calvary. If God could have altered one precept of his law to meet man in his fallen condition, then Christ need not have died. *Review and Herald*, October 9, 1888.

The law really is valid and true, a description of the only way the universe can operate in peace and harmony. God’s law is good, and the cross demonstrates that eternal fact. It is not God’s law that is bad in convicting us of sin, it is our sinful selves. It is not God that condemns us to death, but we condemn ourselves. To blame God is to follow the Devil’s defamatory propaganda.

It is the work of Satan to present the Lord as lacking in compassion and pity. He misstates the truth in regard to him. He fills the imagination with false theories concerning God; and instead of dwelling upon the truth in regard to the character of our Heavenly Father, we fasten our minds upon the misrepresentations of Satan, and dishonor God by mistrusting him and murmuring against him. When we act like culprits under sentence of death, we bear false witness against God. The Father gave his only begotten and well-beloved Son to die for us, and in so doing placed great honor upon humanity; for in Christ the link that was broken through sin was reunited, and man connected again with Heaven. You who doubt the mercy of God, look at the Lamb of God, look at the man of sorrows, who bore your grief and suffered for your sin. He is your friend. He died on the cross because he loved you. *Review and Herald*, January 14, 1890.

Not only does the cross reveal the true nature of sin and the Devil, but it is also the supreme demonstration of what sin does to God. Some descriptions of the meaning of the atonement may speak of God’s abhorrence of sin and his terrible antipathy for sinners, but understanding God as the one who makes a healing at-one-ment heightens the terrible results of sin not only for man, but for God.

Few give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ’s agony; but that suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. *Education*, 263.

By examining the wonderful plan of redemption to restore the sinner to the moral image of God, we see that the only means for man’s deliverance was wrought out by the self-sacrifice, and the unparalleled condescension and love of the Son of God... We can see in the cross of Calvary what it has cost the Son of God to bring salvation to a fallen race. *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 135.

Christ’s words that he came to give his life as a ransom for many are thus not referring to paying off the Father (or the Devil, as some atonement theories have suggested!), but express the

incredible cost to God in righting the broken relationship caused by sin. Nor was the act of dying itself the only aspect of God's work of "at one-ing" the world to himself. Christ's death was a part, although the supreme part, of the whole atonement.

It was not alone His betrayal in the garden or His agony upon the cross that constituted the atonement. The humiliation of which His poverty formed a part was included in His great sacrifice. The whole series of sorrows which compassed humanity Christ bore upon His divine soul. 6BC 1103.

Nor is God's atonement simply a restoration of what was lost. Because of what God has done, and because of the evidence that is now so clearly demonstrated, the trustworthiness of God's character is in no doubt. The Fall and redemption has proved beyond all doubt God's true nature, and as a result all who trust in God through Jesus Christ have an even closer relationship to him.

By His life and death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan's purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen.

Review and Herald, February 25, 1915.

This aspect of the atonement emphasizes that the legal forgiveness of sinners is not the most important part of God's reconciliation. The eternal kingdom will not be inhabited by pardoned yet still dubious criminals, but fully restored and trustworthy children of God.

The plan of salvation is not merely a way of escape from the penalty of transgression, but through it the sinner is forgiven his sins, and will finally be received into heaven--not as a forgiven culprit pardoned and released from captivity, yet looked upon with suspicion and not admitted to friendship and trust; but welcomed as a child, and taken back into fullest confidence. Review and Herald, September 21, 1886.

That God can and will do this is the essence of the atonement offered to all through the life and death of God in Christ.

Value

The value placed on fallen humanity is found in the supreme sacrifice God has made, a sacrifice of himself for the most mediocre of rebels. While of ourselves we are truly nothing, and have nothing to boast of, that does not mean we are nothing to God. God values each of his unique children. To do what he has done shows us how much we are "worth" to him.

Christ has died for us, and we are not to think that we are of no value before the Lord; for the cross of Calvary reveals the fact that we are valued by the infinite sufferings of the Son of God. Review and Herald, July 5, 1892.

I am glad that we have a Saviour whose love cannot be measured, except as we look to the cross of Calvary with comprehensive faith. The light that streams from Calvary shows us the value of the soul and of eternal life. Review and Herald, October 30, 1888.

It is only in the light of Calvary's cross that we can estimate the value of our salvation. Review and Herald, February 14, 1888.

This in turn has a direct impact on the perception of God's true character. How can God be doubted, how can he be misunderstood, how can his intentions be questioned?

You who doubt the mercy of God, look at the Lamb of God, look at the man of sorrows, who bore your grief and suffered for your sin. He is your friend, He died on the cross because he loved you. Review and Herald, January 14, 1890.

We must believe the words of God just as he has spoken them; we must take Christ at his word, believe that he came to represent the Father, and that the Father, as represented by Christ, is our friend, and that he desires not that we should perish, or he would have never given his Son to die our sacrifice. Review and Herald, March 8, 1892.

Can there be any more doubts as to the true nature of God? Can pseudo-pagan concepts of the atonement be maintained, suggesting that God in some way needed to be appeased or satisfied? Can the idea that God was in some way "bought off" be sustained?

The Drawing Power of the Cross

In Ellen White's comments on the meaning of the atonement one frequently quoted verse is John 12:32—either as an explicit reference or underlying her understanding. The drawing of all to God Jesus by his being lifted up on the cross well expresses the activity of God in "at one-ing" us. This verse is vitally significant for Ellen White's perception of how God has reconciled us to himself--not by some mechanistic ritual, judicial procedure or bargaining transaction—but by wishing to win back what was lost: a relationship based on trust. On the cross God shows himself totally trustworthy, and as a consequence humanity is drawn to this clearest demonstration of God in whom they can have confidence.

The following few examples of Ellen White's many comments illustrate this key determinant of the meaning of the atonement:

Jesus has said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Christ is constantly drawing men to himself, while Satan is as diligently seeking by every imaginable device, to draw men away from their Redeemer. Christ must be revealed to the sinner as the Saviour dying for the sins of the world; and as he beholds the Lamb of God on the cross of Calvary, the mysteries of redemption begin to unfold to his mind, and the goodness of God leads him to repentance.... Christ draws the sinner by the exhibition of his love upon the cross, and this softens his heart, impresses the mind, and inspires contrition and repentance in the soul. Review and Herald, April 1, 1890.

Christ said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Christ is to be the great center of attraction, the object to which the attention of the world is invited; and the word of God so portrays him... He [God] would have us comprehend something of his love

in giving his Son to die that he might counteract evil, remove the defiling stains of sin from the workmanship of God, and re-instate the lost, elevating and ennobling the soul to its original purity through Christ's imputed righteousness. Review and Herald, November 1, 1892.

"And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die." This is the crisis of the world. If I become the propitiation for the world, it will be lighted up. The defaced image of God would be reproduced and restored, and a family of believing saints will finally inhabit the heavenly home. This is the result of the crucifixion of Christ and the restoration of the world. MS 33, 1897 (Questions on Doctrine, 671).

It is by beholding Christ upon the cross of Calvary that the sinner is drawn to his Saviour; and he realizes that Christ has died for him, his heart is melted into contrition and tenderness. Review and Herald, July 5, 1892.

What is this "drawing" of sinners to Christ by His cross? In essence it is the revelation of God as he is, in the fullest expression of divine truth. That is what wins distrustful human beings back to trust and replaces fear with confidence, hate with love. Knowing God as he truly is, understanding the lengths to which he is prepared to go: that is what convinces cynical, skeptical rebels and persuades them to trust the only One who is able to transform them into loyal dependable friends. In this way the image of God is remade in the human mind, and the believer becomes safe to be admitted to eternal life.

How? Because sin is fully revealed in its real nature and its dire consequences. Sin broke the heart of the Son of God on the cross, and sin must break the heart of the sinner if he is to be healed. No longer does the spirit of rebellion rule, but the deep conviction of the need for reconciliation as understanding dawns of what he truly is: a diseased degenerate demon!

Jesus says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." And as one is drawn to behold Jesus uplifted on the cross, he discerns the sinfulness of humanity. He sees that it is sin which scourged and crucified the Lord of glory. He sees that, while he has been loved with an unspeakable tenderness, his life has been a continual scene of ingratitude and rebellion. He has forsaken his best Friend and abused heaven's most precious gift. He has crucified to himself the Son of God afresh, and pierced anew that bleeding and stricken heart. He is separated from God by a gulf of sin that is broad and black and deep, and he mourns in brokenness of heart. Mount of Blessing, 9.

Yet this mourning is not despair. For the cross answers the problem of separation by offering reconciliation—the process of becoming at one with God. God does not leave us where we are. Knowing we are incapable of helping ourselves, that he is the only one who can heal and renew, God acts. God stretches out his hand to cross the gulf and carries us back to himself.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the son of man has been lifted up, that we might look and live. There is but one plan of salvation. There is but one process by which the soul may be healed of its wounds. Look to the man of Calvary. RH April 9, 1889.

Jesus Christ laid hold on humanity, that with His human arm He might encircle the race, while with His divine arm He grasped the throne of the Infinite. He planted His cross midway between earth and heaven, and said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." The cross was to be the great center of attraction.

It was to speak to all men, and to draw them across the gulf that sin had made, to unite finite man with the infinite God. It is the power of the cross alone that can separate man from the strong confederacy of sin. Christ gave Himself for the saving of the sinner. Message to Young People, 137-138.

He [the Saviour] loves us with a love that is inexpressible, and if at any time you begin to fear that you will be lost, that Jesus does not love you, look to Calvary. Do you want a clearer expression of his love than that which the Father has bestowed upon us, in that he has given us his Son? The light shining from the cross of Calvary should make us the happiest people on the earth. Review and Herald, August 5, 1890.

Deeper than this, the uplifted, drawing cross of Christ has implications far beyond the individual sinner. The light of Calvary shows all as they really are: God, man, Satan, the angels... The cross is not just the answer to our own specific needs. It is the answer to the whole Great Controversy itself!

"Now is the judgment of this world," Christ continued; "now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die." This is the crisis of the world. If I become the propitiation for the sins of men, the world will be lighted up. Satan's hold upon the souls of men will be broken. The defaced image of God will be restored in humanity, and a family of believing saints will finally inherit the heavenly home. This is the result of Christ's death. The Saviour is lost in contemplation of the scene of triumph called up before Him. He sees the cross, the cruel, ignominious cross, with all its attending horrors, blazing with glory. But the prince of this world is cast out. The accusations which Satan has brought against God are refuted. The reproach which he has cast upon heaven is forever removed. Angels as well as men are drawn to the Redeemer. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth," He said, "will draw all men unto Me." Desire of Ages, 625-6.

The wider meaning

The meaning of the atonement, the significance of the cross, is greater than this world, more than our salvation, important though that is (especially for us). To remove the word "men" supplied in John 12:32 by the translators of the King James Version: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto me." Or as the TEV renders the verse: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me." 'All' and 'everyone' means more than the inhabitants of this little planet. The cross settles the argument throughout God's universal family, an argument that has centered on the kind of person God really is.

For Ellen White then, the atonement involves settling the questions of all the intelligences of the heavens, vindicating God, rebutting the Devil and his lies, upholding the moral system of the universe, confirming the trust of all who have believed in God, revealing the consequences of sin in

the most potent and dramatic way in taking it upon himself. The cross has a meaning as wide as the universe itself.

But 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; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice--its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man--the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: 'Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto me.' [John 12:31,32] The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God, and would reveal the nature and results of sin. Patriarchs and Prophets, 68, 69.

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. The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Signs of the Times, Dec. 30, 1889.

This work of Christ was to confirm the beings of the other worlds on their innocency and loyalty, as well as to save the lost and perishing of this world. He opened a way for the disobedient to return to their allegiance to God, while by the same act He placed a safeguard around those who were already pure, that they might not become polluted. Review and Herald, January 11, 1881. (Questions on Doctrine, 677).

All heaven triumphed in the Saviour's victory. Satan was defeated, and knew that his kingdom was lost.

To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, "It is finished," had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished. They with us share the fruits of Christ's victory.

Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or the unfallen worlds...They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion...

All heaven and the unfallen worlds had been witnesses to the controversy. With what intense interest did they follow the closing scenes of the conflict...Heaven viewed with grief and amazement Christ hanging upon the cross...

Well, then, might the angels rejoice as they looked upon the Saviour's cross; for though they did not then understand all, they knew that the destruction of sin and Satan was forever made certain, that the redemption of man was assured, and that the universe was made eternally secure. Desire of Ages, 758-764.

Through the plan of salvation a larger purpose is to be wrought out even than the salvation of man and the redemption of the earth. Through the revelation of the character of God in Christ the beneficence of the divine government would be manifested before the universe, the charge of Satan refuted, the nature and result of sin made plain, and the perpetuity of the law fully demonstrated. Signs of the Times, Dec. 22, 1914.

This 'drawing' by Christ's cross is therefore not only of humanity, but of all the universe—a larger perspective which is so significant. Significant because it illuminates what the issues in the conflict between God and Satan really are and how they have been resolved by God so that each of his created beings are left in no doubt. Significant because it shows that God has always been concerned to preserve the freedom of choice of all his children, that he wants only willingly offered love and respect, not slavish terror. Significant because he is so open in all his dealings that he invites inspection of his every motive, and places himself on trial.

When Christ cried out from the cross, "It is finished," all Heaven triumphed. The controversy between Christ and Satan in regard to the execution of the plan of salvation was ended. The spirit of Satan and his works had taken deep root in the affections of the children of men; but the holy angels were horror-stricken that one of their number could fall so far as to be capable of such cruelty as had been manifested to the Son of God on Calvary. Every sentiment of pity and sympathy which they had ever felt for Satan in his exile was quenched in their hearts.... to manifest such malignity toward the divine Son of God, who had with unprecedented self-denial and love for the creatures formed in his image, come from heaven and assumed their fallen nature, was such a heinous crime against Heaven that it caused the angels to shudder with horror, and severed the last tie of sympathy existing between Satan and the heavenly world. Signs of the Times, September 23, 1889.

Atonement and vindication

In this way, God settled all doubt. In the end, God and his true nature is vindicated. Right is proved to be always right, and God's perfect correctness of attitude and action is demonstrated as forever true.

It was in order that the heavenly universe might see the conditions of the covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race....By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, all doubts would be forever settled, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. Christ alone could restore honor to God's government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped....Who witnessed these scenes [of Christ's crucifixion]? --The heavenly universe, God the Father, Satan and his angels....Satan's charge in regard to the conflicting attributes of justice and mercy was forever settled beyond question. Every voice in heaven and out of heaven will one day testify to the justice, mercy, and love of God. Signs of the Times, July 12, 1899.

God's aims have always been the same: peace, love and harmony throughout his universe based on freely-given assent to the right and truth of God's ways. Any other kind of imposed worship or arbitrary requirements would destroy that freedom to love God for who and what he is: goodness and truth supreme. In this way the cross is the safeguard of eternity.

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... Signs of the Times, December 30, 1889.

How and why? Because all will know the true character of sin, and will never wish to take that route. All agree that God really is right, and though forever free to choose, forever follow right for right's sake.

For though they trusted God, until the cross the loyal angels had an imperfect understanding of his real nature. They did not realize the depths to which he would love. They failed to see how a God of right could reclaim sin-sick rebels. They could not comprehend the selflessness of the Almighty God. As a result they expected something very different as God came to earth:

The heavenly intelligences were prepared for a fearful manifestation of Almighty power. Every move was watched with intense anxiety. The exercise of justice was expected. The angels looked for God to punish inhabitants of the earth... The heavenly universe was amazed at God's patience and love... To save fallen humanity the Son of God took humanity upon Himself... Review and Herald July 17, 1900.

Why then the cross? The cross is the final answer of God to all the questions and queries, doubts and uncertainties. In all his past dealings God could only express himself in limited ways. Now at the cross he revealed his true nature, and proved he had done absolutely everything the Divine Creator could ever do to save, and heal, and restore.

The universe of heaven, the worlds unfallen, the fallen world, and the confederacy of evil cannot say that God could do more for the salvation of man than he has done. Never can his gift be surpassed, never can he display a richer depth of love. Calvary represents his crowning work. It is man's part to respond to his great love, by appropriating the great salvation the blessing of the Lord has made it possible to obtain. Youth's Instructor, October 17, 1895.

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