

1. The Provocation and Provision

Texts: Genesis 1-3; Revelation 12:7.

Quotes:

- While we are contending for our own Liberty, we should be very cautious of violating the Rights of Conscience in others, ever considering that God alone is the Judge of the Hearts of Men, and to him only in this Case, they are answerable. *George Washington*
- Fallacies do not cease to be fallacies because they become fashions. *G.K. Chesterton*
- But here steps in Satan, the eternal rebel, the first free-thinker and emancipator of worlds. He makes man ashamed of his bestial ignorance and obedience; he emancipates him, stamps upon his brow the seal of liberty and humanity, in urging him to disobey and eat of the fruit of knowledge. *Mikhail A. Bakunin*

Introductory questions

What is the problem with starting in Genesis? When did sin begin? What happens if we do not understand what went wrong? What is really a question of “provocation”? When God made the “provision” for sin, what was he really doing? What was so significant about taking and eating the fruit? What of Lucifer and his role?

Discussion ideas

Where did sin begin? All too often we run directly to Genesis 1-3 rather than at the very beginning is in the mind of Lucifer. It is perhaps unfortunate that in a lesson on the actions of Lucifer that Revelation 12:7 is not mentioned. There may also be some question over this lesson’s title. Is the action of Lucifer merely a “provocation”? Lucifer’s charges run right to the heart of the nature and character of God and his government. This is more than provocative—it is a condemnation of God as he truly is. Also, what of “provision”? Presumably that word is focusing on God’s making some arrangements for human salvation. But this is a narrow focus. God’s response to Satan’s attack is the whole of the great controversy, not just the provision of salvation for humanity. The same aspect applies to the major subject of the quarter—the cross. The cross is not just the means of our salvation, it is God’s most dramatic and demonstrative answer to the accusations made by Satan.

“Lucifer began a campaign of subversion, maliciously insinuating that God was autocratic, His laws arbitrary, and His expectation of worship and service from the creation unreasonable. Ingratitude, egotistic ambition, self-love, covetousness, dissatisfaction, hostility, deceit, malice, and a craving for worship and power were the fruits of Lucifer’s pride.” (Monday’s lesson). Is this all? Additionally, what is the real test? Is it a question of breaking the rule or is it more than this:

“How would you respond to the charge, “Why was God so harsh with Adam and Eve? After all, what did they do other than eat a piece of fruit?” What is being missed in this charge?” (Thursday’s lesson). Not only this, but the whole question of imposed penalty or natural consequence arises here. For the true understanding of the solution that God provides hinges on recognizing what went wrong. Was it disobedience to an arbitrary requirement or the rupturing of relationship, a refusal to trust in the trustworthy God? Much depends on the concept of God and what is seen as his requirements in how such questions are answered.

Ellen White Comments

The plan of redemption is not merely a way of escape from the penalty of transgression, but through it the sinner is forgiven his sins, and will be finally 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. {7BC 950}

Satan's rebellion was to be a lesson to the universe through all coming ages—a perpetual testimony to the nature of sin and its terrible results. {PP 42-3}

The underworking [of Satan] was so subtle that it could not be made to appear before the heavenly host as the thing that it really was... This condition of things had existed a long period of time before Satan was unmasked. {TA 40}

The mighty argument of the cross demonstrates to the whole universe that God was in no wise responsible for the course of sin that Lucifer had chosen; that it was no arbitrary withdrawal of divine grace, no deficiency in the divine government, which inspired in him the spirit of rebellion. {4SP 320}

Extra material

The lesson correctly emphasizes the importance of free will, and that God created beings in his Universe with that ability to make such free choices. Without the ability to choose there would be no sense in God's "requirements," nor in concepts of love and trust—for these would be compelled if there were no choice. Nor would there be any sense of sin, for if there is no choice, there could be no sin, no evil consequence, no redemption. This is also the problem with the concept of predestination. However even though freedom may be emphasized, the relationship between us and God can become "mechanical" and "deterministic," particularly if the emphasis is on our legal standing or on dealing with "objective" sin. To illustrate: "When was the last time you ever heard of a happy computer, a joyous PC, or a loyal and loving laptop? Why can't these things, which can do amazing intellectual feats, ever be happy, loving, or loyal?" (Sunday's lesson).

But what do you do with a computer that tells lies? Confronted with one that was communicating such obvious untruths, I returned it to my friendly computer shop with a warning that it couldn't be trusted. In short, it was an inveterate liar, a sinful machine.

The technician smiled. "What do you mean, it's sinful? Computers can't sin. They're not human." "So what else is it," I replied. I'd seen for myself its bad attitude problem, its total disregard for objective reality, its persistent refusal to speak truthfully. "It's been lying to me all day. Just take a look."

As the technician hooked up the wires which make up a computer's life-support system, I explained the problem. I'd turned the machine on in the morning, as I had a thousand mornings before. But this particular morning it had been different. A blatant lie, a perverse message. "No mouse."

Not, of course, that it was quite so direct. Computers never are. The actual content was to the effect that Windows had failed to detect the presence of a mouse connected to the system. That would have been fine except for the fact that the supposed non-existent mouse was very obviously attached. So I did the usual. Checked the connection, decided all looked fine, and re-started the machine. Same lie. I tried again. Lie repeated.

I told my computer friend to get right to the heart of the problem... Soon the necessary surgery was complete. A new I/O card fitted, some functions of the motherboard disabled. The machine was rewired, and the lying stopped. The heart of stone was replaced with a new heart, one that is now committed to telling the truth... I get a glimpse of how damaging sin is. How repeated lies can cause real injury. The lying computer is a frustrating image of the harm we cause ourselves, and the drastic measures that God sometimes has to take.

How important it is to tell the truth, to be right and true and honest. How we must recognize our need of healing change and transformation that only God can bring. How we need to accept God's offer of forgiveness and rebirth, to be made new in His image once more. How we cannot remain habitual liars and enemies of truth, but must to come back to our loving Lord and be accepted as his true and trustworthy friends. That's what God wants to do for each of us, for you and me—and we can choose God and His healing salvation if we want. As for computers, now...

2. His Glorious Purpose Foreshadowed in Types

Texts: Gen. 4:1-8, 22:1-19, Num. 21:4-9.

Quotes:

- The original sin was not in eating of the forbidden fruit, but in planting the tree that bore the fruit. Lemuel K. Washburn
- Sin becomes disobedience to authority not violation of integrity. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

Introductory questions

What is the meaning of sin? Its consequences? Its resolution? Why is it important to answer such questions? In Satan's rebellion, was it just a question of breaking rules? Similarly with Adam and Eve—was it all about picking and eating fruit? How is the story of Cain and Abel relevant? How is sin seen in the context of the great controversy?

Discussion ideas

This lesson primarily concerns sin and its resolution. These are vital issues. Since the lesson spend much time trying to identify sin, its nature, and its consequences, it is surely appropriate to follow this lead and to examine what sin really means.

The quick answer usually given is that "sin is the transgression of the law." Of course, Galatians 3:19 must also be referenced here, since that text tells us that law was added because of transgressions. In other words, the existence of sin means that law has to be spelled out. Not that law did not exist before sin, but more in the sense of the natural order of things in God's universe. As EGW points out, it came as something almost unheard of for the angels to discover there was a law, because they had been naturally following law without even being aware of it. From this perspective, law is the reflection of the way in which God operates, the system he has established, his very character itself.

So if sin is the breaking of this kind of divine system and nature, then it obviously means far more than the failure to observe some rule. If this is true, then the resolution of sin is way beyond the fixing of broken rules. Rather it is the consummation of the universe-wide conflict over God, answering the charges of the Satan, validating the character of God's government, and restoring harmony throughout the cosmos.

Rather than run directly to types of sacrifice is then something of a short-circuit. The whole of Scripture is an answer to the sin problem, not just the sacrificial system and the types of Christ. "The problem of sin was way too deep for anything any of us, as sinners, could do to solve it... Only the Lord Himself could take care of the problem of sin; only He could provide the needed Lamb." (Wednesday's lesson). The question then is what does the Lamb answer, what is the meaning? The view must be wider than simply our own situation...

Similarly in Thursday's lesson: "Put yourself in the position of an Israelite who just got bitten by a deadly snake, which has already killed others around you. *You're told that the only way to live is to look at a copy of the snake.* Why is this such a good example of what it means to live by faith, to trust in what you don't fully understand, and to accept your own utter inability to save yourself?" What is being suggested here? Is it just a question of blind obedience? Meaning?

"Sin, to be understood as sin, must be seen in the context of who we are in relationship to God." (Monday's lesson).

Ellen White Comments

It was generally believed by the Jews that sin is punished in this life. Every affliction was regarded as the penalty of some wrongdoing, either of the sufferer himself or of his parents. It is true that all suffering results from the transgression of God's law, but this truth had become perverted. Satan, the author of sin and all its results, had led men to look upon disease and death as proceeding from God,—as punishment arbitrarily inflicted on account of sin. Hence one upon whom some great affliction or calamity had fallen had the additional burden of being regarded as a great sinner. {DA 471 }

It was God's purpose to place things on an eternal basis of security, and in the councils of heaven it was decided that time must be given for Satan to develop the principles which were the foundation of his system of government. He had claimed that these were superior to God's principles. Time was given for the working of Satan's principles, that they might be seen by the heavenly universe. {DA 759 }

Satan led men into sin, and the plan of redemption was put in operation. For four thousand years, Christ was working for man's uplifting, and Satan for his ruin and degradation. And the heavenly universe beheld it all. {DA 759 }

By the same misrepresentation of the character of God as he had practiced in Heaven, causing him to be regarded as severe and tyrannical, Satan induced man to sin. And having succeeded thus far, he declared that God's unjust restrictions had led to man's fall, as they had led to his own rebellion. {GC88 500 }

Extra Material

What is sin? Sin is the transgression of the law. That's the commonest definition. Does that mean that if we are in ignorance of the law then we are not sinning? Clearly not: Paul reminds us that sin remains sin even though we may not be aware of it. So we need to revise our definition a little. Sin is not just a conscious breaking of some specific law. We may well be transgressing (breaking) laws we don't even know about. Does that make us innocent. Not at all.

So then, what if we live absolutely exemplary lives, be very Pharisaical in our observance of each law in minute detail - does that make us sinless? Again obviously not. The mere absence of infraction of specific law does not render us good. So what *is* a good picture for this sin problem? I remember seeing a movie poster advertising one of Stallone's films called *COBRA*. The slogan read: *Crime is a disease. Meet the cure.* Perhaps we can use that slogan, slightly altered: *Sin is a disease. Meet the cure, Jesus.*

Now that takes us a little closer to an answer to our question, What is sin? And that's reflected in the NIV translation of 1 John 3:4: Sin is lawlessness. When I say that word, what do you immediately think of? Lawless? Outlaws...lawless frontier towns. Bandits. Westerns. The only 'law' the law of the gun, the fastest gun in the West and so on.

Why were they lawless? Because they chose to go out and break the law? Or because of their inner attitude? Lawlessness speaks of an inner attitude of mind, a way of thinking and living that is out of harmony with the standard of conduct and behaviour and living that the law expresses. There's another Bible definition that can help us here: Romans 14:13. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. A hard text, but when you break it down it's not so difficult. What's faith? Faith is trusting God, having confidence in him. So what is the opposite of faith? Distrust, not having confidence in God. So this definition comes out something like: SIN IS NOT TRUSTING GOD.

Sin is that antagonistic attitude, that spirit of rebellion, that separates us from God. We have gone away from God, built a barricade between us and him, and like spoilt children refuse to come back to the only One who can really help us. So in desperation God broke through that barricade and came to us, to ask us to allow him to take us home again.

3. Jesus and the Sanctuary

Texts: Exod. 24:5-8, 25:8, 29:12, 30:10, Lev. 10:18, Isaiah 53.

Quotes:

- God is vindictive, blood-thirsty and, quite clearly, as mad as a hatter. *Jeremy Stangroom*
- If there is a single God, it would seem that he is a complex character with many faces: the Creator, the Angry God, the Loving God, the Bloodthirsty God, God the Lawgiver and God Judge... But the more we look at them, the more likely it is that we will be convinced that they are not the true faces of God, but merely the characteristics we project on him. In monotheism, as in polytheism, belief in God tells us more about the believer than it does about God himself. *Martin Foreman*
- One drop of Christ's blood is worth more than heaven and earth. *Martin Luther*
- The wonder of the cross is not the blood, but *whose* blood, and to what purpose. *Donald English*

Introductory questions

How does the sanctuary help in understanding the plan of salvation? What are the dangers? Is there a way in which the sacrifice of Jesus can become as meaningless as the temple sacrifices God complains about in Isaiah 1? What of the whole issue of blood sacrifice—how can this be explained without making God seem a blood-thirsty pagan deity?

Discussion ideas

There is much in this lesson easily misunderstood. The sanctuary was a lesson-book to God's people in ancient times, that when coupled with the sacrificial system, was meant to communicate vital concepts. However even the Israelites in their day did not recognize the true significance of what they were being taught. Again and again God objects to their "meaningless sacrifices," because the worshippers believed that by fulfilling the rituals they were set right. Through his prophets God rejects such mechanistic worship, pleading for understanding and true relationship. In fact he says he has no pleasure in the blood of bulls and goats (Is. 1:11). Similarly in Is. 66 he compares sacrifices to murder or presenting dogs or offering pig's blood! Why? Because "They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations." (Is. 66:3 NIV). God is wanting far more than sacrifice—he wants relationship, understanding, recognition of meaning, true worship, considered thought...

Tuesday's lesson asserts, "Whatever spiritual lessons were to be taught through the tabernacle service, the sacrifice of these animals, the spilling of their blood, was central to the whole process. This shouldn't be surprising. As sinners, we should be destroyed, because sin leads to death... Because blood represented life, spilled blood represented death, and the death of each sacrifice pointed to the death of Jesus, the means by which sinful humanity could be restored, in full, with the Creator." There is much talk about blood, much of which even as the lesson admits, is abhorrent today. But our delicacies aside, what is the meaning of blood, and why is it important? Can we become as inured to such ideas as to become unmoved as the temple attendants at the rivers of blood? As always we must be looking for the meaning, and not remain simply satisfied with the actual symbol or the clichés.

"...the sin and iniquity that a person was bearing was transferred to the innocent animal, and the animal itself suffered the death that, otherwise, would have been the sinner's. This is part of the process that's called *atonement*." (Wednesday's lesson). Is this how you would describe atonement? Why/why not?

Ellen White Comments

Then, through the blood of the atonement, we become partakers of the divine nature; through Christ we are children of God, and we have the assurance that God loves us even as He loved His Son. We are one with Jesus. We walk where Christ leads the way; He has power to dispel the dark shadows which Satan casts across our path; and, in place of darkness and discouragement, the sunlight of His glory shines into our hearts. {5T 741}

God did not have as great delight in their shedding the blood of beasts as in obedience to his commandments. The offerings were divinely appointed to remind sinful man that sin brought death... God required of his people obedience rather than sacrifice. {4aSG 74-5}

The truth of God had been hidden beneath a mass of tradition and error. The sacrificial offerings which had been instituted to teach men concerning the vicarious atonement of Christ, to teach them that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, had become to them a stumbling-block. All that was spiritual and holy was perverted to their darkened understanding. They were blinded by pride and prejudice so that they could not see to the end of that which was abolished. Jesus came to change the order of things that then existed, and reveal to them the character of the Father. He drew aside the veil which concealed his glory from the eyes of mortals, and made manifest to the world the only true and living God, whom to know aright is life eternal. {RH, November 1, 1892}

Many forgot the true significance of these offerings; and the great truth that through Christ alone there is forgiveness of sin, was lost to them. The multiplying of sacrificial offerings, the blood of bulls and goats, could not take away sin. {ST, January 2, 1893}

As Jesus came into the temple, He took in the whole scene. He saw the unfair transactions. He saw the distress of the poor, who thought that without shedding of blood there would be no forgiveness for their sins. He saw the outer court of His temple converted into a place of unholy traffic. The sacred enclosure had become one vast exchange. {DA 157}

The conditions of obtaining mercy from God are simple and reasonable. The Lord does not require us to do some grievous thing in order to gain forgiveness. We need not make long and wearisome pilgrimages, or perform painful penances, to commend our souls to the God of heaven or to expiate our transgression. He that “confesseth and forsaketh” his sin “shall have mercy.” Proverbs 28:13. {AA 552}

Extra material

In the year 64 there was a Governor of Palestine called Cestius. Cestius wanted to convince Nero how important Palestine was and how important the Passover Feast was. To do this he took a census of the lambs killed at the Passover Feast in AD64. He wanted really to prove how many people were there. There had to be ten people for every lamb, and so for the number of pilgrims you have to multiply by ten. In that one year the number of lambs killed was 256,500.

Imagine what the Temple Court was like—reeking, ankle-deep in blood, with this crimson tide of the blood of the lambs flowing! And surely the young Jesus says, ‘People are looking for God, that’s what they came here for, not this bloody sacrifice.’ Jesus says, ‘There’s no God there.’ It was the biggest disillusion that had ever hit a boy in history. *No God there...*

So he had gone first of all to the Temple and the sacrifice—no God in that crimson tide... [William Barclay, Discovering Jesus (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), p.16.]

4. A Body You Have Prepared For Me

Texts: John 1:1-3; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 1:8, 9; 5:7-9.

Quote: There never was more than one Christian, and he died on the Cross. *Friedrich Nietzsche*

Introductory questions

Why is it important to consider Christ's nature? What are the effects on salvation? How does this relate to the great controversy? Why did Jesus have to take on humanity? How does Jesus through his death achieve redemption? Did anything in God needed to be changed before he could forgive? Is there any problem in concentrating on the human nature of Jesus?

Discussion ideas

Much debate has occurred over the centuries regarding the nature of Jesus. All too often the concentration has been in relation to the perceived requirements of a sacrifice acceptable to God, and the focus is on us. This misses the issue of the cross as a vital part of the answers in the great controversy. It's perhaps more helpful to concentrate on how the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is God's clearest response to the charges made by Satan. It is all too easy to forget that Jesus is also God, and that he is personally demonstrating his true nature and character in very practical and illustrative ways.

The importance of both the divinity and humanity of Jesus is surely due to this. However, a narrower perspective may want to center on our own needs: "It's not hard to understand why the humanity of Jesus is so important to us. After all, by taking upon Himself human nature, Christ linked Himself to the race in a remarkable way. Why, though, is His sinlessness so important?" (Tuesday's lesson).

Christ's sinlessness is more to do with his qualifications in responding to the accusations made by the Devil that in a "perfect offering" that satisfies the demands of divine justice. Otherwise there is the strange postulate that God is satisfying himself by the provision of himself...

The "emptying" of Jesus (see Philippians 2) is not one in which Jesus gives up divinity, but one of a refusal to use divine power and position for personal advantage. In the temptations we see Jesus responding as a divine being—for the temptations are not ones that are likely for a being with only human powers. The real question is what do we see as to the kind of person God is in the form of Jesus? The truth is that God in human form lived among us, shared our experiences, and died at our hands. He lived in a sinful world yet did not compromise his principles, revealing in the most practical way how God operates, his true nature, and his desire to restore harmony through the universe.

So the debate over divine/human nature is somewhat wrong-headed, for Jesus had a unique nature that was fully both. The arguments are not so much over this, but how this applies to us—whether we can achieve sinlessness, how righteousness is "imputed," how we are saved.

Thursday's lesson comments, "Fortunately, we don't need to know all the intricacies regarding the nature of Christ in order to benefit from what He accomplished for us. God has revealed enough for us to be saved." Is this what it is all about? And is it only true that "Christ needed to be both God and man in order for the plan of salvation to succeed." The immediate question is of course, why? The response to this will of course depend on your perspective of God and his actions in the light of the great controversy.

Ellen White Comments

We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ. He is a brother in our infirmities, but not in possessing like passions. As the sinless One, His nature recoiled from evil. He endured struggles and torture of soul in a world of sin. His humanity made prayer a necessity and privilege. He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity. {FLB 49}

There is one great central truth to be kept ever before the mind in the searching of the Scriptures—Christ and Him crucified. Every other truth is invested with influence and power corresponding to its relation to this theme. . . . The soul palsied by sin can be endowed with life only through the work wrought out upon the cross by the Author of our salvation. . . . Christ submitted to crucifixion, although the heavenly host could have delivered Him. The angels suffered with Christ. God Himself was crucified with Christ; for Christ was one with the Father. Those who reject Christ, those who will not have this man to rule over them, choose to place themselves under the rule of Satan, to do his work as his bondslaves. Yet for them Christ yielded up His life on Calvary. {FLB 50}

We need a deep insight into the nature of Christ and into the mystery of His love, “which passeth knowledge” (Eph. 3:19). We are to live in the warm, genial rays of the Sun of Righteousness. Nothing but Christ’s loving compassion, His divine grace, His almighty power, can enable us to baffle the relentless foe and subdue the opposition of our own hearts. What is our strength? The joy of the Lord. Let the love of Christ fill our hearts, and then we shall be prepared to receive the power that He has for us. {HP 64}

Extra material

“I perceive that there is danger in approaching subjects which dwell on the humanity of the Son of the infinite God . . .” wrote Ellen White {5 SDABC 1129}.

The great danger is in stressing the humanity of Jesus as a direct parallel of ours, that we can work our own salvation -- even if we hedge with statements about “only through Christ”—and fall into a dread religion of unquestioned frightened obedience. The “law model” cannot save us, however we interpret it. The Stoic way of beating ourselves into cathartic submission is not the gospel but legalism, as dry as the hills of Gilboa that have neither dew nor rain. And attempting to do all the fighting against temptation, the putting to death of the old man, the submission of self, will never work. Jesus has won the battle already—we don’t have to fight old wars! In ourselves, with our fallen humanity, we can never win. But with Jesus, in his unconquered, undefeated divine-human nature, we have victory!

So, instead of emphasizing the humanity of Jesus, let’s remember who he has always been: God himself. He was God with the Father in the very beginning, “He did not cease to be God when He became man.” And he will always be God. Remember, it was only because he was God that his death saves us: for no created being can die to save another. So move away from the stress on the human Jesus and his “fallen nature,” away from works righteousness and perfectionism to the Son, the Son of God who sets you free, and he who has the son is free indeed. Free to choose the right because it *is* right, not because someone says so, or orders you, or threatens you.

Truth and error often lie side by side. It is so easy to become confused. Yet the warning is there, and the danger spelled out. Perhaps the best test is that of the fruits. If you struggle to emulate Christ and continually fail and become discouraged and depressed; or if your religion is harsh and foreboding; or if you have no assurance of salvation— then you need to look again. The great deception, the omega or heresy, is that Jesus was not quite God, that his victory was not quite enough, that you must work to save yourself. The great truth is that we already have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, if we believe in him we are saved, and that we possess eternal life now. All God needs from us is our complete trust in him, and he saves us by changing us: “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2: 13). Believe it, and the divine Christ will do what he promises. . .

5. In the Shadow of Calvary

Texts: Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:28-36; 24:7; Acts 10:38, 39; 1 Cor. 15:13-18.

Quotes:

- Freed to draw by its own power, the cross remains the magnet of the souls of men. *Kenneth Cragg*
- Are you a shrewd businessman, quick to see the profits of this world? If you are, I can offer you a bargain which you cannot afford to miss. Take the sign of the cross. At once you will have an indulgence for all the sins which you confess with a contrite heart. The cross is cheap and if you wear it with humility you will find that you have obtained the Kingdom of Heaven. *Saint Bernard*

Introductory questions

Why did Jesus make such clear references to the event and manner of his death? Did Jesus “have to die” in order to save? What did Jesus expect his death to accomplish in the eyes of his Father? If Jesus only had to come to die to save us, why did he spend so much time doing other things? What does Jesus death say about God, not just to us, but all the Universe?

Discussion ideas

Jesus makes a number of references 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 as EGW 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.

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.

Sunday’s lesson states: “Whatever else Jesus came to do—the healing, the teaching, the preaching, the raising from the dead—it all was to point the people not only to who He was but to what He was going to do for them by His death. Because without that death and what it would accomplish for the world, in the end all His other work would have been in vain.” How would you react to such a view?

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?

Ellen White Comments

Christ is the atoning sacrifice. He left the glory of heaven, He parted with His riches, He laid aside His honor, not in order to create love and interest for man in the heart of God, but to be an exponent of the love that existed in the heart of the Father. {TMK 83}

The Father suffered in His Son. The measure of God's love is Christ. The Saviour's sacrifice was not to create in God a love that had not before existed; but it was the expression of a love that had not been appreciated or understood. {BTS, February 1, 1908 par. 1}

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 that 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 heavenly intelligences, in the sight 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 gave His only-begotten Son to die for us. *Signs of the Times*, May 30, 1893.

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.

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.

Extra material

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).

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.

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.

© Jonathan Gallagher 2004