

God's Love: The Basis of Atonement¹



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 139:1–4; Isaiah 46:10; John 1:4; Romans 5:8; Romans 8:37–39; 1 John 5:11, 12.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Before something even happens, I announce how it will end. In fact, from times long ago I announced what was still to come. I say, “My plan will succeed. I will do anything I want to do” ’ ” (Isaiah 46:10, NirV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: God's work of salvation² comes from Himself. It does not require sinners to beg Him to love them.

THERE ARE MANY MYSTERIES ABOUT GOD that we cannot fully understand. They include His nature,³ His holiness, and His power. But there is one part about Him that we can begin to understand. It is His love, a love shown to us through His Son's work as our Savior. It is a work that touches us personally. It is a work that grows out of God's own nature. This week we begin our study of the doctrine of salvation. We begin our study knowing that God's love and greatness are the main reasons for our salvation. Nothing outside God forced Him to do what He did for us in His Son. Instead, God Himself decided to pour out His love and grace⁴ toward this sinful world.

1. atonement—Jesus' dying for our sins so we would not have to die for our sins; the cleansing and forgiving power of Jesus' death to wash away our sins.

2. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death.

3. (God's) nature—any of the qualities or aspects of God that make Him who He is, such as His love, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, holiness, power, and so on.

4. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 28**ETERNAL GOD (Psalm 102:25–27)**

What do the words “in the beginning God created . . .” (Genesis 1:1) suggest about the nature of God? Before you answer, read also Genesis 21:33 and Psalm 90:2.

The idea of eternity (forever) is difficult for us to understand. We are humans (men, women, or children) with limitations (at least in this life). We know that we will die. In fact, everything that we are or have lasts a short time. It is here today but will one day be gone. Almost everything in this world had a beginning and will have an end. So, the idea that God never has a beginning and never has an end is not easy to understand. Our minds have trouble thinking about and understanding eternity or life that never ends.

Of whom is Psalm 102:25–27 speaking in the New Testament? (Read Hebrews 1:10–12.) What message does this verse, along with Psalm 90:2, teach us about how long God exists (lives)?

God is eternal (forever; without end). He existed (lived) before all created things. For this reason, God has to be self-existent.⁵ But people and animals are not. We all need air,

water, and food to continue living (Genesis 1:29). But God needs nothing to exist. Throughout eternity, before He made anything, there was nothing else with God. He existed by Himself, dependent upon nothing. He is life in Himself. And only He who is life in Himself, the Eternal Self-existing One, can restore (give back) life to repentant⁶ sinners. Created life, both now and for eternity, all comes from God, the great Life-Giver (read John 1:4; 1 John 5:11, 12). We are dependent upon Him for everything.



**We all need air, water, and food to exist.
But God needs nothing to exist.**

Think about how dependent you are on God for your life. How much more so for eternal life? Should not your understanding of how much you depend on God make you more humble? Why does false pride disgust God?

5. self-existent—the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit live eternally (without end). They do not have a beginning or an end. They were not created. They are Creators.

6. repentant—being sorry for your sins and turning away from sin.

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 29**A LOVING GOD (Psalm 118:1–4)**

The mystery of God lies beyond our full understanding. He is not something that we can find by ourselves (Job 11:7). The Bible does not give us a very clear description of how God exists. But the Bible presents a God who shows Himself through His actions, through the way He relates to us. We come to know who He is by what He tells us about Himself. Otherwise we would know little about Him.

The Bible tells us that God is love. He is self-giving. He shows care and concern for the well-being of others.

What do Psalm 118:1–4; Romans 5:8; Romans 8:37–39; and 1 John 4:8, 9, 16 tell us about the character⁷ and nature of God?

The statement “God is love” (1 John 4:8) takes us into the very center of God. It tells us several things. (1) “God is love” means that a deep study of God would show that God is basically love. This understanding of God’s love is very important to understanding the doctrine (church belief) of atonement. (2) “God is love” means that He is a Person who enjoys fellowshiping with His people. It is through fellowshiping with His people

that He shows His love. If we want to know if God loves us or not, we do not examine our feelings and emotions. Instead, we look at how He has treated us as sinners. (3) “God is love” means that there is nothing outside God that can influence⁸ Him to love us. Because God is love, it is unnecessary, even impossible, for us to make ourselves lovable so that we can be accepted by Him. And nothing shows His love toward us more than the plan of salvation. The same minute we fell into sin, Christ became our Mediator⁹ and Savior. This is the greatest example of God’s love toward sinful humans.



God is love. Nothing shows God's love for us more than the Cross.

7. character of God—who God is; having and understanding the character of God is the same as being kind, loving, honest, and so on. God’s law (Ten Commandments) shows us His character.

8. influence—to have power, or an effect over persons or things.

9. mediator—a lawyer or go-between who helps bring quarreling people together. Jesus is the Mediator between God and us. Jesus helps to bring us back to God. He is our lawyer in the heavenly court. He works to make peace between God and us.

“Since God loved us that much, we also should love one another” (1 John 4:11, NIV). What are useful ways you can show love toward others? What things in your own life block you from showing that love?

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 30

GOD AS CREATOR (Psalm 100:3)

The Bible is strong and clear: God is the Creator. Without this basic truth, the Bible message has no meaning. On the other hand, God as Creator means that He is different from creation. This means that He is on a higher level than the things He created. God as the Creator means that there was nothing before Him or before His acts of creation (Romans 4:17; Hebrews 11:3). God as Creator means that everything belongs to Him and depends on His power and goodness for life support (Psalm 24:1, 2; Psalm 104:10–14). God as Creator means that creation shows the glory and power of its Creator (Psalm 19:1–3; Romans 1:20).

What did the Creator promise in Isaiah 65:17 and Revelation 21:1 to a world damaged by sin?

The Bible clearly says that God created and supports everything

through the power of His Son (John 1:1–3; Hebrews 1:2, 3). The atonement is God's answer to the problem of sin within this world. God did not leave us to suffer the terrible results of sin and rebellion,¹⁰ which would be eternal ruin. Instead, He established the plan of salvation.¹¹

How does Paul describe those who are in Christ in 2 Corinthians 5:17?

The power God showed during the creation of the universe¹² is the same power He uses in re-creating fallen human sinners into His own image. God brought everything to life through the power of His Word (Psalm 33:6). And now, through the powerful word of Christ in human form, God re-creates us (John 1:1, 12, 13; 2 Corinthians 4:16).



The power God used to create the world is the same power He uses to re-create us in His likeness.

10. rebellion—a fight or struggle against any kind of power.

11. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

12. universe—all the matter (things), light, and energy (forces in nature that do work) that have been discovered (found) or that we know of.

Is there something that you have made and care about or something that you put a lot of work and care into? In what ways does your act of creating it make you its owner? How do you feel about what you have made? How, in a small way, might this comparison¹³ help us understand what we mean to God, who created us?

WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 1

HOLY GOD (Isaiah 40:25)

What do Isaiah 40:25 and Isaiah 57:15 tell us about the nature of God?

The holiness of God is not just an addition to God. But, like love, His holiness shows what He is in Himself. At least two basic ideas are connected with His holiness.

First, His holiness describes God as very special. The word *holy* means what has been set apart for the very special service of the Lord. But when we speak of God as holy, we mean that He is very special and cannot be compared¹⁴ with anything else. There is no one in the universe like our majestic God (read Isaiah 46:5, 9). Only God is worthy of our worship.

Second, God being holy does not mean that He is far-off, unreachable to us, and unable to have fellowship with us. God's holiness and His love cannot be separated from each other. His holiness shows itself in His will-

ingness to live with humble humans. By living among them, God lets His people take part in His holiness.

What promise is found in 2 Corinthians 5:21?

God's holiness cannot accept sin but is actively opposed to it (Isaiah 5:24; Hosea 9:15; Romans 1:18). "Your eyes are too pure to look at what is evil. You can't [cannot] put up with the wrong things people do" (Habakkuk 1:13, NlrV). God's natural hatred for sin made the Mediator necessary. God designed a way for sinners to be made holy and to enjoy fellowship with Him again. This was possible through Christ. Jesus mysteriously united (joined as one) atonement and holiness. The Holy One (Jesus) was born as a baby on this planet of sin (Luke 1:35). He came to make us pure through the power of His atoning (forgiving and cleansing) death. "We have been made holy because Jesus Christ offered his body once and for all time" (Hebrews 10:10, NlrV).



Jesus was born as a baby so that we might enjoy fellowship with God again.

13. comparison—the act of showing how two things are the same.

14. compared—to have shown how two things are the same.

Someone says: “Why do I need a Savior? I am not that bad, certainly not as bad as many others.” How should our understanding of God’s holiness help us answer this person correctly?

THURSDAY—OCTOBER 2

ALL-SEEING GOD (Psalm 139:1–4)

What do Psalm 139:1–4, 15, 16; Isaiah 46:10; and Matthew 10:30 tell us about God’s knowledge?

God is omniscient (all-seeing, all-knowing). This means “he knows everything” (1 John 3:20, NIV). Nothing is hidden from Him. “Nothing God created is hidden from him. His eyes see everything. He will hold us accountable (responsible) for everything we do” (Hebrews 4:13, NIV). He oversees the universe He created. So, He knows every part of it (Psalm 139:7–10). His knowledge of us is perfect and complete. God alone is just and fair because He alone knows everything.

The Lord fully knows what is in the present. He also perfectly knows what will be in the future (Isaiah 46:10; Matthew 26:34, 74, 75). The future cannot be hidden from Him. Neither can the past nor the present.

What does 1 Peter 1:19, 20 tell us

about God’s foreknowledge¹⁵ about the rise of sin?

The fact that God is all-knowing is very important for the doctrine of atonement. Because God knows everything, sin was not something that caught Him by surprise. The God who perfectly knows all His creatures knew in advance about the fall of one of His angels (Satan). So, He made a plan to deal with the problem of sin even before it arose in humans: “But where sin increased, God’s grace increased even more” (Romans 5:20, NIV). Therefore, God’s decision (plan) to save us was hidden in eternity and shown in Christ. This is “the mystery that was hidden for a very long time” (Romans 16:25, NIV), “hidden in the mind of God, who created all things” (Ephesians 3:9, NIV). Before God created anything, He had foreseen the start of sin. And He decided to defeat it instead of fearfully running away from it. From God’s point of view, Christ is “the Lamb whose death was planned before the world was created” (Revelation 13:8, NIV).

God knows everything about you, things that no one else would even dare suspect. And despite that knowledge, He still loves you. How should that help influence how you treat others, even though they have their faults?

15. foreknowledge—knowing that something will happen before the event happens.

FRIDAY—OCTOBER 3

ADDITIONAL STUDY: God and Redemption:¹⁶ “Only as we think about the great plan of salvation can we better understand the character of God. The work of creation was an example of His love. But the gift of God to save the guilty and ruined race, alone shows how deep His love and mercy are.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*¹⁷ for the Church, volume 5, page 739.

Forgiveness and Justice: “When we study God’s character with the Cross in mind, we find mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness joined with fairness and justice. At the throne of God we find Jesus with scars in His hands and in His feet. These scars show how much suffering He went through to bring sinners to God. We find a Father, holy and unreachable, but still willing to receive us to Himself through His Son’s sacrifice.¹⁸ The cloud of God’s wrath (anger) against

sin threatened only misery and despair. But the light from the Cross shows the writing of God: Live, sinner, live! ye repentant, believing souls, live! I have paid a price.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 333.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Go back over the main points of this week’s lesson. What other basic parts of God’s nature (character; who God is) can you think of? What part would they play in the plan of salvation?
- ❷ What can we learn about God’s holiness that would help us better understand what it means for us to be holy?
- ❸ Some people struggle with the question of God’s foreknowledge and our free will. How free are we in making our choices if God knows beforehand what choices we would make? Discuss.

16. redemption—the process (method or way) through which Jesus saves us. He buys us back from sin and sets us free through His death on the cross.

17. Testimonies—the writings of Ellen G. White.

18. sacrifice—the act of giving up something of value, such as life, to save or help someone or something.