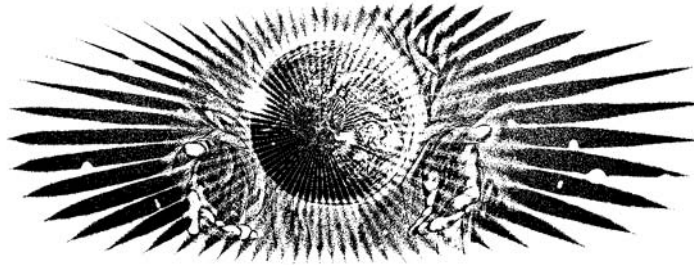


Atonement¹ and God's Desire to Save Us



SABBATH—OCTOBER 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 3:19–22; Romans 5:6–8; Romans 5:20, 21; Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:26, 27; 2 Timothy 1:8, 9; Titus 1:2.

MEMORY VERSE: “He [God] showed us the mystery² of his plan. It was in keeping with what he wanted to do. It was what he had planned through Christ. It will all come about when history has been completed. God will then bring together all things in heaven and on earth under one ruler. The ruler is Christ” (Ephesians 1:9, 10, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: To show that the Godhead³ expected the Fall. And then They made a plan to solve the problem of sin long before it arose.

HUMANS⁴ WERE GIVEN THE FREEDOM TO MAKE CHOICES. No other creatures (animals) had this power. Once God gave the humans this freedom, it was theirs. God could not take it away from them without making a big change in their very nature.⁵ They could use this freedom by choosing to serve Him through love, thankfulness, and obedience. Or they could use this freedom to refuse the gift of life and disobey the Lord. (After all, if humans did not have the choice to disobey, they really would not be free.)

God foresaw that it would be possible for humans to disobey. So, He acted accordingly. He developed the plan of salvation⁶ long before humans were created and before evil and sin appeared. It was a plan that centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

1. atonement—the forgiveness and cleansing we receive by faith through Jesus' sacrifice (death) on the cross.

2. mystery—anything that cannot be fully understood or explained.

3. Godhead—the Father, His Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit are the Three Persons who make up the Godhead. Together they are One God.

4. humans—men, women, or children.

5. nature—the particular aspect or quality of something that makes it what it is. God created us with the freedom to choose to serve Him or not to serve Him. This freedom of choice, or free will, is part of our nature.

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

SUNDAY—OCTOBER 19**THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S LOVE
(Romans 5:6–8)**

In Romans 5:6–8, what caused God to bring salvation to us through Jesus?

God did not have to save the human⁷ race (group). It was not something that He was forced to do. It is difficult to imagine the Godhead saying, "Had we done this or that, Adam and Eve would not have fallen into sin. So, now we should do something to save them from their problem." Instead, humans got themselves into this condition⁸ after the Fall:⁹ " 'God made men honest. But they've [they have] made many evil plans' " (Ecclesiastes 7:29, NIV).

If God felt He had to save us, salvation would be something that we deserve. But this is not true. It is something that we *do not* deserve. But God was willing to give it to us anyway. This makes His work of salvation for our good even more wonderful. He did for us not what He was forced to do but what He chose to do out of love. He, the Creator, did not have to do that for us.

What is Paul saying in Romans 3:19–22 about how we are saved? What part does the law have in solving the problem caused by sin?



God chose to save the human race because He loves us.

Because of sin, it is impossible for humans to restore (renew) their relationship with God by obeying the law (read Romans 8:3; Galatians 3:21). The law could not save us in the same way anymore than feeding a dead body could bring it back to life. If something were to happen, God Himself would have to take the first step. And He did through Jesus on the cross. This righteousness (holiness) comes to the believer by faith and not by works of the law. If salvation was something that we could earn by obeying, God would owe it to us to save us. But, God decided that humans would be forgiven only through the work and person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

What means more to you (and why?): someone doing something

7. human—of, or concerning, men, women, or children.

8. condition—the way a person or thing is or becomes; a state of being.

9. the Fall—the loss of eternal (forever; without end) life that took place in Eden after Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

nice to you because he or she had to, or someone doing the same thing for you out of love?

MONDAY—OCTOBER 20

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S GRACE¹⁰ (Ephesians 1:7)

When sin came into the world, the people living on unfallen worlds and the angels of the universe¹¹ were wondering what God was going to do with this rebellious (sinful; not obedient) group. The angels and the unfallen beings (people) were to be surprised. They were to see something they probably never had seen before. They saw a part of the love and power of God that would now be shown after the fall of Adam and Eve. God was going to defeat sin on this planet through the power of *grace*. God showed Himself to be kind and merciful toward these sinful and rebellious people. Jesus spoke about the Father, "He is kind to people who are evil and not thankful" (Luke 6:35, NIV).

What is the meaning in Romans 5:20, 21 of Paul's sharp difference between sin and the example of God's grace?

In the Bible, grace is a part of God's

love. And it is given in a special way to sinners. It seems to show a living, powerful part of God's nature.¹² His nature is always trying to restore sinful people to full unity¹³ with Him. The Bible teaches the idea that grace means the atoning (forgiving and cleansing) work of Christ done for us as a gift. It is a work of salvation that we do not deserve. God's grace suggests that there is no excuse for our sin and that we deserve eternal (forever) death. But, instead of that death we were given the hope and promise of eternal life. Finally, this wonderful part of God's nature was shown to the universe in the person and work of Christ. It is only in Christ that we find and enjoy "the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7, NASB).



God's saving grace is a gift we do not deserve.

What is Paul talking about in 2 Corinthians 8:9? More important, how have you experienced for yourself the kind of grace shown in

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

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

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

13. unity—when two or more people or things are joined together as one; when two or more people are in agreement in ideas, feelings, and so on.

this verse? How has your life changed as a result of what Christ has done for you?

TUESDAY—OCTOBER 21

AN ETERNAL PLAN (Ephesians 1:4)

God was not forced to save us after the Fall. But He did so anyway. This decision (choice) was very expensive for Him. It cost Him the life of His Son. But He did not waste time having second thoughts about the sacrifice¹⁴ of His Son.

What do Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:26, 27; 2 Timothy 1:8, 9; and Titus 1:2 tell us about when the plan to save us was started?

The New Testament tells us several things about the mystery of God.

First, the plan was made before the “world was created” (Ephesians 1:4, NIrV). This suggests that long before humans fell into sin the Godhead had created a plan to deal with the problem.

Second, God’s mystery “has been hidden for many ages” (Colossians 1:26, NIrV). The plan was prepared in advance. But it also was decided that the plan would be put into use at the right time. So, it remained hidden within the Godhead for ages.

Third, the mystery is directly connected with Christ (Colossians 1:27).

This points to the mystery of the person of Christ, His ministry (work), death, and work for the good of sinful humans. It is basically the good news of salvation through Christ. In other words, it means the Christian gospel¹⁵ (Ephesians 6:19).

Fourth, this mystery is God’s purpose in Christ “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head [ruler], even Christ” (Ephesians 1:10, NIV). The plan was to bring back, in and through the person of Christ, the unity that was ruined through sin. The success of this plan is already seen in the unity of Gentiles and Jews in the church (Ephesians 3:6). Fifth, the mystery was secretly planned within the Godhead before the creation of the world. But it has now become known through the coming of Christ into human history.

Even before the beginning of the world, God’s plan was to save the world. And each one of us was included. What hope can you receive from the amazing (wonderful) truth that God’s plan was to save you even before you were born?

WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 22

THE WAY OF THE CROSS (Mark 10:45)

God could have stopped human rebellion¹⁶ in several different ways. He quickly could have destroyed

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

15. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news of salvation.

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

Adam and Eve, even the whole planet. Or He also could have decided to leave them to suffer and die for their sins.

But there was one thing God could not have done. He could not have overlooked man's rebellion. He could not pretend that nothing had happened and let their relationship continue as before.

In the end, what did God do? He did not destroy Adam and Eve. God did not leave them alone. He did not forget them. Instead, He put to work His eternal plan of salvation through Christ.

What do Mark 10:45; Galatians 1:4; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2; and Titus 2:14 tell us about the plan of salvation?

Once God made a decision to save us, He did not have several choices on how to do it. In fact, there was just one choice. Sin could be solved only through the work of Christ on earth. If we were to be saved from eternal death, Jesus had to "give" (offer; sacrifice) Himself for us. Christ could not avoid (escape from) His human birth and death if we were to be saved. In other words, there is only one road to heaven. And it passes through the heart of Christ on the cross.

When Jesus was in Gethsemane,¹⁷ He went through the suffering of



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death (Matthew 26:36–46). He felt the weight of all the sins of the world. He prayed to the Father, asking Him for another way to save sinners instead of the cross. The answer came in silence. There was no other way out for the human problem except through the sacrifice of Christ.

In the mystery of God's council, before the world was created, the Son of God offered Himself to die as our Substitute.¹⁸ As we read in the above verses, Jesus "gave" Himself for us. There was no other way.

Again, Jesus did not really have to save us. But He did it willingly, out of love. As soon as He decided to save sinners through His sacrifice, He could not escape from this choice. "I give up my life. But I will take it back again. No

17. Gethsemane—the name of the garden on the Mount of Olives where Jesus spent His last night before He died on the cross.

18. Substitute—someone or something that takes the place of another person or thing. Jesus is our Substitute because He died for our sins.

one takes it from me. I give it up myself. I have the authority [power] to give it up. And I have the authority to take it back again' ” (John 10:17, 18, NlrV).

THURSDAY—OCTOBER 23

GOD'S PLAN SHOWN IN JESUS (Luke 4:43)

What do Luke 4:43; Luke 9:22; Luke 17:25; Luke 19:5; Luke 22:37; Luke 24:7; Luke 24:26; and Luke 24:44 tell us that Jesus “needed” to succeed in His mission (plan) of salvation?

In most of these verses we find a verb that could mean “it is necessary” (Greek, *dei*). The verb shows a very important part in the life of Jesus. The whole life of Jesus was directed by His need to succeed in His mission: “ ‘We must [it is necessary for us to] do the work of him who sent me’ ” (John 9:4, NIV). At the beginning of His public work, He said to the disciples (followers), “ ‘I must announce the good news of God’s kingdom to the other towns also. This is why I was sent’ ” (Luke 4:43, NlrV). Every part of Jesus’ life was part of the plan of salvation. For example, Jesus saw Zacchaeus and said to him, “ ‘I must [it is necessary for me] stay at your house today’ ” (Luke 19:5, NIV).

But the real goal of the ministry of Jesus was not just preaching the good news of the kingdom of God.

There was a dark path (death) that Jesus “needed to” take. He needed to go to Jerusalem. He could have chosen not to go. But Jesus knew that this was a very important part of God’s plan. So, He said to His disciples “that he must [it was necessary for him to] go to Jerusalem and suffer many things . . . , and that he must [it was necessary for him to] be killed” (Matthew 16:21, NIV). He was going there because it was necessary for Him to be rejected (not accepted) by the evil generation¹⁹ (Luke 17:25). He was to be counted with the transgressors (lawbreakers; sinners) (Luke 22:37). And He was to be lifted up (put to death; crucified) on the cross (John 3:14; John 12:34). But dying was not enough to fulfill Jesus’ mission. It was necessary for Him to be raised back to life (Acts 17:3), to be received in glory, and to remain there until all the prophecies²⁰ were fulfilled (Acts 3:21). He was following God’s eternal plan.



Jesus walked a path of suffering to save us.

19. generation—all the people born about the same time. Your parents belong to one generation. You and your friends who are your age belong to another generation.

20. prophecies—messages sent from God that tell what will happen in the future.

What are the necessary things in your life that you must do? And what things are not necessary? How do you tell the difference between them? And why is it so important that you can do so?

FRIDAY—OCTOBER 24

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Describing Grace—“We would never have learned the meaning of this word ‘grace’ if we had not fallen. God loves the sinless angels who do His service and obey all His commands. But He does not give them grace. These angels know nothing of grace. They have never needed it, because they have never sinned. Grace is a gift of God given to un-deserving humans. We did not try to get it. But God sent it looking for us. God rejoices to give this grace to everyone who hungers for it. This is not because we are worthy, but because we are very unworthy.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, page 100.

Redemption:²¹ Not a Last-Minute Effort—“The purpose and plan of grace were planned from all eternity [before time began]. Before the beginning of the world God decided that men and women should be created. They should be given the power to do God’s will. God foresaw the downfall of man, with all its results. But it did not stop Him from carrying out His

eternal purpose. This is because the Lord would establish His throne in righteousness. He knows the end from the beginning. . . . So redemption was not planned at the last minute.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, page 129.

“Jesus knew He was to die. He also foresaw exactly how horrible and cruel His death would be. He really did not have to do it. But He went ahead and made His life our offering for sin. Both God the Father and God the Son thought alike in love. And it was the same love that drove Jesus to choose to die on the cross as our Substitute.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Bible Echo*, November 25, 1895.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ In the second Ellen G. White quote in Friday’s study, she makes it clear that God foresaw our fall and all the pain and suffering that would come with it. But He created us anyway. Why would He do that, knowing what would happen? How does the third paragraph in Friday’s study help answer that question? How does the suffering of Jesus help us better understand why God lets us have our own suffering?
- ❷ Write a page about what impressed you the most from this week’s lesson. Bring it to class and share it with others.

21. 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.