

***Atonement and the Cross of Christ***  
***Atonement and the Divine Initiative***

Lesson #4 for October 25, 2008

Scriptures: Romans 3:19-22; 5:6-8,20,21; Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:26,27; 2 Timothy 1:8,9; Titus 1:2.

1. This lesson focuses on the fact that God knew about the fall of man and made provision for it even before this earth was created. Why is that important? So long as the plan works, does it matter when it was formulated?
2. As many of us are aware, there is an ongoing debate between those who believe in man's free moral choice and those who believe in the foreknowledge of God. Does God's foreknowledge limit your own personal freedom? In what way? Does God really know everything in advance, or does He just know all the possible outcomes of each choice? (The "end" of every "beginning"= the "result" of every "cause." The Greek could be translated that way.) If God is completely sovereign and we have no freedom, then that takes away our responsibility. Some are very happy to hear that!
3. Is it true that God's foreknowledge makes us predestined? How does God know the future? Or are there a certain number of truly free choices?
4. Did God foreknow our fall simply as a possibility, or did He know it as an actual fact? Read Romans 5:6-8. God chose to reach out to His fallen children because of His love for His creatures. It should be clear that God was not obliged in any way to do that. Is it a waste of our time to spread the gospel because God already knows who is going to be saved?
5. Romans 3 is critical in understanding why Jesus came and died. Notice that it first points out that God is the center of the great controversy. His character is what is at stake, and how He runs His government is the issue. God must be shown to be right in what He says, and He must win His case when He goes into court. (Romans 3:4) Because we are all sinners, we do not deserve anything from God. Romans 3 goes on to explain that the law serves to point out our sins. Next, in Romans 3:25-27, Paul clearly stated that the purpose of the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ was to demonstrate the righteousness of God—and he repeated it three times before anything about our sins is mentioned!—because He had apparently overlooked man's former sins. But now that the truth is known about the results of sin, God can proceed with His plan to save human beings without in any way modifying or doing away with any part of His law. Three times Paul said that the death of Christ was primarily to demonstrate the righteousness of God. And then, once that has been clearly demonstrated, He can save man without any question being raised about His justice or His love. Finally, at the end of Romans 3, Paul asked if that somehow does away with the law? Absolutely not! The law still functions as it was intended to function. But many people are not able to understand this. All they can think about is how God is going to save you and me! So how do we reach out to such people? How does the death of Jesus help to demonstrate the righteousness of God? It looked like God had lied to us when He said that sin leads to death. It looked like Satan was right in saying that God lied to us. But finally, God Himself came and accepted to take upon Himself the results of sin and

demonstrate what happens when a person is abandoned by God to reap the consequences of sin. Jesus died of sin—what in the Bible is called the second death. Now we can see who was telling us the truth back in the beginning in the Garden of Eden. Jesus could die that death as a human and rise on Sunday morning because of His divinity. Now, we have a choice: Live as Jesus lived and reap eternal life, or die eternally as Jesus died. And God has preserved the record of sin from the beginning so sin will never rise again.

6. How does the death of Jesus demonstrate the righteousness of God? Why does the righteousness of God need to be revealed before Jesus can forgive sinners? Or does it? Is forgiveness what sinners need? Is a change of character what sinners need?
7. When Adam and Eve sinned, God had three choices:
  - 1) God could have said, “I warned you about what would happen if you sinned. Now you have taken of the fruit, and you must die.” However, if God had done that, the rest of the creatures in the universe would be inclined to say, “Beware! God is not truly loving! Look what happens if you get out of line!”
  - 2) God could have done what we human parents do all the time. He could have warned Adam and Eve very strongly against ever committing sin again, reviewed with them the consequences of sin, and then generously He could have forgiven them, allowing them to remain in the garden. There are two problems with that approach: a) It would mean that God’s previous words in Genesis 2:17 were not, in fact, true; b) It would even suggest that death comes because God gets upset and kills people instead of death coming as a natural consequence of the sin itself. But someone might say that if God had foreknowledge, He should not have said what He did in Genesis 2:17. That raises another question: Is the death that results from sin an inevitable consequence of the sin itself? Or is it because God is upset, and He kills those who get out of line? If, in fact, it is indeed a direct consequence of the sin, then it was loving of God to give us the warning. God certainly forgave them, but that did not remove the consequences!
  - 3) God could, and did, say, “I have made provisions for dealing with sin, but you cannot understand all of the implications right now. So, I will wait until the right time (Galatians 4:4) to demonstrate the truth about sin and its consequences. I will come to this earth as a human being, and I will live a life as a human being, and I will die the death which is a consequence of sin. Then, all human beings will be able to see for themselves whether or not God or the Devil was telling the truth back in Genesis.”
8. Theologians speak a great deal about the *substitutionary* death of Jesus. What does that mean to you? (Romans 5:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21) Some people have suggested that in some “mystical” way, we were joined to Christ in His death, and therefore, our sins die, and then we rise with Christ to a new life without sin. But that sounds like we die with Christ! The problem is that those people are focused on the past. They want some legal way to deal with their past sins.
9. How important is it for us to understand why Jesus had to die? The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* suggests, “We don’t have to fully understand God’s choice to rescue us. He just wants us to accept and believe He has provided a way out. We simply have to choose to accept it.” So, is it important for us to understand why Jesus had to die? Or is it just important for us to say, “Okay. Whatever you say, I accept”?
10. Is it important for us to be free moral agents? What are the other choices? Would you be willing

to give up some of your freedom in order to have guaranteed salvation? Is that possible?

11. Read Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:26,27; 2 Timothy 1:8,9; and Titus 1:2. From these verses we have learned several things:

1) God foresaw and planned for all eventualities before this earth was created. (Ephesians 1:4)

2) Although God had a plan in place, He did not reveal it for long periods of time. (Colossians 1:26)

3) This mystery is directly connected with the life, ministry, and death of Jesus. (Colossians 1:27)

4) God's plan is to restore peace, harmony, and unity throughout the entire universe. (Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19,20)

5) God's plan has been made known now that it is necessary for the salvation of man.

12. As a part of that grand plan, Jesus stepped down from His position as God and walked among the angels as Michael the Archangel, One of them. When man sinned, Jesus became a human being and walked among human beings as a human being. More than that, He died the worst kind of death—the death which is the result of sin—being rejected and tortured by those who claimed to be His friends and faithful servants. (Philippians 2:5-10) As a result, we have the opportunity to study and learn from His life and His death, and we can choose to live the kind of life which He lived. (Galatians 2:20)

13. Read Mark 10:45; Romans 8:3; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:4; 2:20; Ephesians 5:2; and Titus 2:14. Repeatedly in Scripture we are told that Jesus came to die for our sins.

14. Was this method or plan which God put into action the only possible way to save mankind? How do we know? When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Let this cup pass from me," (Matthew 26:39-42) was He asking if there was any other possible way? Apparently, there was not another way because God did not change the plan.

15. There are many, many texts in Scripture suggesting that Jesus needed to minister as He did and then to give up His life and die as He did. See, for example, Luke 4:43; 9:22; 17:25; 18:31-33; 19:5; 22:37; 24:7,26,44; Matthew 16:21; 17:22,23; 20:18,19; Mark 8:31-9:1,31; 10:32-34. All of these verses make it abundantly clear that it was necessary for Him to be rejected by an evil generation, (Luke 17:25) to die the death of a common criminal, (Luke 22:37) and to be lifted up on the cross. (John 3:14, 12:34) But He must do one additional thing after dying and being laid in the grave. To prove His divinity, He must come forth from the grave by His own power. (John 10:18)

16. God took extensive and detailed steps to create a plan for the salvation of human beings. Why is there no plan for Satan and His angels? Is it really impossible for God to save them? Is God omnipotent if He cannot save them?

But even as a sinner, man was in a different position from that of Satan. Lucifer in heaven had sinned in the light of God's glory. To him as to no other created being was given a revelation of God's love. [762] **Understanding the character of God, knowing His goodness, Satan chose to follow his own**

**selfish, independent will. This choice was final. There was no more that God could do to save him.** But man was deceived; his mind was darkened by Satan's sophistry. The height and depth of the love of God he did not know. For him there was hope in a knowledge of God's love. By beholding His character he might be drawn back to God. {DA 761.5}

17. Is it important for us to discuss these questions? Can we know the answers with certainty? Does it matter what we think about God and how He runs His government?

We are not to think of God only as a judge, and to forget him as our loving Father. Nothing can do our souls greater harm than this; for our whole spiritual life will be molded by our conceptions of God's character. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 5, 1887 (RH 126:1:2); *Our High Calling* 176; *That I May Know Him* 262

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