

Grace¹



SABBATH—MAY 9

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Exodus 25:8; Isaiah 53; Romans 5:18, 19; 2 Corinthians 3:16–18; Ephesians 2:4–10; Titus 2:11–14.

MEMORY VERSE: “But here is how God has shown his love for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, NIV).

THERE WAS AN IMPORTANT CONFERENCE (MEETING) on comparative religions,² in England. Experts from around the world discussed which belief made the Christian faith special and different from other religions. They began listing beliefs. Incarnation?³ Other religions had beliefs about gods appearing in human form. Resurrection?⁴ Again, other religions had beliefs about returns from death. The meeting went on for some time until Christian writer C. S. Lewis entered into the room. “‘What’s the discussion about?’ he asked. He was told the experts were discussing what Christianity had that no other religion had. Lewis answered, ‘Oh, that’s [that is] easy. It’s [it is] grace.’ ”—Adapted from Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), page 45.

Last week we discussed the terrible results of sin. We learned that God has given an answer to the sin problem. This week we will study what that answer was and what God did to save us.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: What are some of the examples or word-pictures God uses to teach us the plan of salvation? What is atonement (forgiveness and cleansing)? How is the idea of Jesus' dying in our place connected with our understanding of the Cross?

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1. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.
 2. comparative religions—how one or more religions is the same as or different from another religion.
 3. incarnation—the belief in God or gods in human form.
 4. resurrection—return to life from the dead.

SUNDAY—MAY 10**GOD GIVES SALVATION⁵
(Genesis 22:8)**

We all know the story of how God tested Abraham's faith and trust. God asked Abraham to sacrifice (give up; put to death) his son, Isaac. Isaac did not know what God had told his father to do. Isaac thought that they were simply going to offer a sacrifice⁶ somewhere. So he asked why they had not taken an animal with them. Abraham then answered with the words that " 'God Himself will provide [give] the lamb for the burnt offering' " (Genesis 22:8, NIV).



God asked Abraham
to sacrifice his son, Isaac.

Why was the prophecy⁷ of Abraham's words important to his son?

Where in the Old Testament do we find verses that point to our being saved through Christ? What are those verses, and what do they say? Read, for example, Genesis 3:15; Exodus 25:8; and Isaiah 53.

Jesus Christ is the center of the Old Testament. The purpose of the earthly sanctuary service⁸ was to point to the coming of the Messiah (God's chosen One; Hebrews chapters 8 and 9). Everything that happened before Jesus entered the world pointed to the Cross too. God waited until the right moment. Then, when "the right time came" (Galatians 4:4, NIV), Christ came to live among us.

"Through every time period, through every hour, the love of God had been given to all sinners. No matter how much men had sinned, God continued to show examples of love and mercy. And when the right time had come, God poured upon the world a flood of healing grace. This grace was never to be stopped or withdrawn till the plan of salvation should be fulfilled."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 37.

Think how many hundreds of years had passed between the promises of the coming Messiah and His coming. We humans (men, women, and children) live only 80 short years. But what should this fact tell us about patience and

5. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life.

6. sacrifice—a gift or offering given to God.

7. prophecy—a special message from God, often an explanation of what will happen in the future.

8. sanctuary service—the offering of animal blood as a payment for sin. The animal blood was offered in place of the sinner's blood. The service represented Jesus' dying on the cross for our sins. After Jesus died, this law was not needed.

about trusting in God when things seem to take such a long time?

MONDAY—MAY 11

PICTURES OF THE MIRACLE OF GRACE (Isaiah 53:7)

How do you explain to a three-year-old child what electricity is? How do you explain to people deep in the African jungles what traffic lights are for and how an elevator works? How can a physicist⁹ ever hope to explain Einstein's relativity theory¹⁰ to a person who has limited education? God faced a communication¹¹ problem with humans. For example, human words cannot explain fully God's love shown in the life and death of Jesus Christ. But God wanted us to have a good idea of what is involved in His plan of salvation. God moved upon the minds of the authors of the Bible to use many different word-pictures. Each picture gives us a better understanding of His grace. None of these pictures should be used separately from the other examples. Taken together, they will make us wonder and admire God's love for us.

According to Isaiah 53:7 and John 1:29, what is one of the best word-pictures God used to help us understand His grace?

In Matthew 20:28; Acts 20:28; and 1 Corinthians 6:20, what other symbol (word-picture) is used to show a deeper truth of the atonement?¹²

We must be careful not to make one symbol more important than another word-picture. We must put everything together from the Bible about the atonement. Then we as limited humans can understand better. The idea of a ransom, of a high price paid for us, is a powerful one. "Christ saved us from sin. He bought us back from sin. . . . What the symbol shows is that (a) our salvation is very expensive and that (b) we have passed from one state to another. This is from the state of slavery to the state of nearness to God."—Adapted from Edward W. H. Vick, *Let Me Assure You* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1968), page 33.

Think deeply about this idea that the Creator of the universe (John 1:1–3) voluntarily went to the cross as the only way of saving us from eternal (forever; without end) death. Why should this truth heavily influence (affect) how we live? Think how foolish it is to let anything earthly make us forget the Cross.

TUESDAY—MAY 12

WHAT HAPPENED AT CALVARY?¹³ (Isaiah 53:4, 5)

9. physicist—a person who is an expert in the field (study) of natural science.

10. relativity theory—a theory dealing with speed in relation to outer space, vacuum, and distances. The theory is so deep that most people do not understand how it works.

11. communication—concerning the many ways God speaks to us.

12. atonement—the forgiveness and cleansing we receive by faith through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

13. Calvary—the name of the hill where Jesus was crucified (put to death).

Bible thinkers have been discussing the doctrine of atonement.¹⁴ Two main ideas about this belief are given. One idea offers a historical view of the atonement. The other idea defends a personal view. What does this mean? The first idea shows something that really happened at a historical point in time on a hill just outside of Jerusalem. This was a real, historical event that made our salvation possible. The other idea shows that how we react (answer) to Jesus' love and self-sacrifice on the cross is very important. We are changed when we are touched by a love so great! Both ideas are true and support each other.

According to Isaiah 53:4, 5 and Romans 5:18, 19, how does the Bible explain the relationship be-



Jesus' death on the cross takes away our sins. We are changed when we are touched by a love so great!

tween what Christ did for us and what we as sinful humans deserve?

Jesus Christ died in our place, so that we will not suffer eternal death but become partners of the life that He offers. This idea is often used to explain Jesus' death as our Substitute.¹⁵ To many people this is a horrible idea. They do not like the language often used to describe God's anger against sin. But the truth is that God has dealt with the sin problem in the way He decided was suitable. Being just (righteous), He could not ignore sin. Being love, He could not forget the sinner. We should have paid for our sins with our own deaths because we are the guilty ones. But Jesus was willing to take our place! That is what happened at the cross. This real event (Jesus' death as our Substitute) became the main reason for our salvation.

Because Jesus died as our Substitute, we are attracted to Him. We accept Him. We change our attitude (thoughts and feelings) toward Him and other human beings too. This is the personal side to the plan of salvation (John 12:32; Romans 5:1).

Think about all the bad things you have done and (perhaps) might still do. Then think about Jesus, who suffered the punishment that you deserve for those actions. How do you feel, knowing

14. doctrine of atonement—the teaching that Jesus' death on the cross forgives the sins of all people.

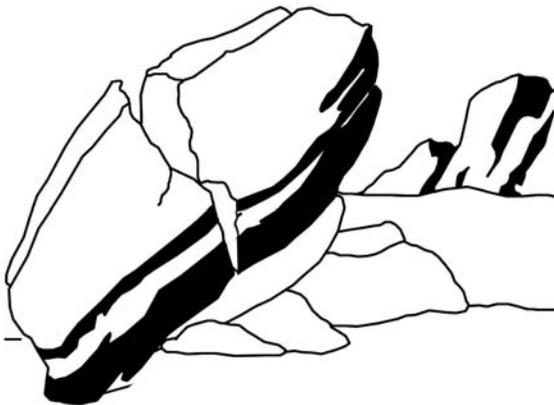
15. substitute—someone who takes another person's place. Jesus is our Substitute because He died for our sins.

that He suffered in your place? How should you answer when you know what Jesus went through for your sake?

WEDNESDAY—MAY 13

A CHANGE OF HEART (2 Corinthians 3:16–18)

God's loving mercy and grace on Calvary has changed millions of hearts. From the very moment He hung dying on the cross, people were touched and changed by the love of Christ. One of the criminals crucified with Him noticed that Jesus was Someone special. He could tell that Jesus had a future beyond this cruel death (Luke 23:39–43). And even the Roman centurion noticed that Jesus was no criminal (verse 47).



Our stony hearts are broken
when we turn to Jesus.

According to 2 Corinthians 3:16–18 and Hebrews 12:2, 3, how should our lives be changed by focusing on Jesus and what He has done for us?

“Let the sinner who repents [is sorry for sin] keep his eyes upon ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’” (John 1:29, NIV). By studying Jesus, the sinner *becomes changed*. His fear is turned to joy. His doubts become hope. A thankful spirit springs up. The stony heart is broken. A tide of love sweeps into the soul. Christ is in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. When . . . we keep our eyes on Him, self no longer competes for attention. Looking unto Jesus, we shall be ashamed of our coldness, our laziness, our self-seeking for honor and glory. We shall be willing to be anything or nothing, so that we may do heart service for the Master.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 439, 440; italics supplied.



Jesus' grace is riches
that have no equal.

How well do Ellen G. White's words show your own experience with Christ? What could be holding

you back from a deeper experience with Christ? How much time do you spend thinking about Christ's death on the cross?

Bible thinkers bring up different theories (ideas) of the atonement. But when everything is said and done, there is no one theory or group of theories that will fully explain the wonder of God's grace (read 1 Corinthians 1:20–25). It is good to talk together about the Bible verses about Jesus' sacrifice. But what Jesus did for us should be not only a topic of debate. Instead, we should prayerfully study and experience it. There is much we cannot understand. But we have been given enough truth so that we should show wonder at what God has done for us in Christ.

THURSDAY—MAY 14

CHRIST OUR SALVATION (Ephesians 2:4–10)

It is easy for Christians to get off the track. For some Christians, the focus of their faith is on the Bible, or on the church, or on the traditions or doctrines (beliefs) of their church. All these may be important. But they can cause problems if they turn us away from Jesus. Jesus alone is the Center of our salvation.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we often depend on the "truth" as the focus of our faith. There is nothing wrong with that. But we should not limit our understanding of truth to a list of doctrines. Our faith should find its center in the truth, as we find it in

Jesus. We believe in a Person who has shown our God to us. He has come to save us. He is now our High Priest in heaven. And He will return to take us home. These facts must be most important to us.

What do such verses in Ephesians 2:4–10 and Titus 2:11–14 teach us about Christ as the Center of our faith?

Ephesians 2:4–10 holds verses that are rich in meaning. Several times it points to the fact that we are saved by grace. This grace is described as "incomparable riches [riches that have no equal]" (verse 7, NIV). These riches come from God's "great love for us" (verse 4, NIV). Grace is *gratis*, free. It cannot be earned. Our works do not bring us eternal life. If that were true, we would have reason to boast about our own goodness. It is God's grace that brings changes in our daily lives. God's grace also makes it possible for us to do "good" works (verse 10). But even these good deeds are God's work in us.

What wonderful description about Jesus Christ as the Center of our faith do we find in Paul's words in Acts 17:28? Read also Galatians 2:16–20.

How should the doctrines we have as Adventists help us better understand what Christ has done for us? For example, suppose that you believed in eternal suffering in hell. How would that, or other false teachings, influence (affect) your

understanding of Christ? Why then are correct doctrines so important in helping us come to know Jesus better?

FRIDAY—MAY 15

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Seventh-day Adventists will point to a certain book when they are asked about the cleansing work of Christ. This book is Ellen G. White's *The Desire of Ages*. Chapters 78 and 79 (pages 741–768) are very clear about the cleansing work of Christ. For example, read page 751: “Jesus was crucified [put to death on a cross] with the thieves. He was put ‘in the midst [middle].’ In the same way, His cross was put in the midst of a world lying in sin. And Jesus’ words of pardon spoken to the repentant [sorrowful] thief turned on a light that will shine to the earth’s farthest places.”—Adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Some people do not like the idea that God required the life of His Son as a “payment” for the sins of people. But that is one of the “pictures” used by the Bible. So we must accept what it says. What should the “pictures” tell us about the seriousness of sin and how much our salvation cost?
- ❷ If there is one doctrine many modern people do not like, it is the atonement. Many do not accept the idea

that our problem should be solved by an action from the “outside.” Should not each person accept responsibility for what he has done? How do you explain the need for God’s action to such people?

- ❸ Those who are saved by grace must also show grace to those around them. How do we as persons show that our lives are filled with grace? How does a church show this grace from God?
- ❹ Why is the “subjective” (personal, emotional) side of the Cross so important? How should the full understanding of Christ’s death for us change us? What should it teach us about forgiveness, about being humble, about patience, about love for the people who are not very loving toward us? What are some useful ways we can show how real the Cross is to us?

SUMMARY: Bible thinkers have developed many theories about the atonement. Most ideas are weak or at least one-sided. Their ideas may be compared with pictures taken from different sides of the Himalayas. They all show the mountains but do not give a full picture. Grace must not be limited to something that we can see and understand. It is the ground of our faith. Christ died for us so that we can have eternal life. Without Him, we are lost. With Him as our Savior, our future is safe.