

### 3. God as Redeemer (1Q 2012—Glimpses of Our God)

**Biblical material:** Rom. 1:18; Gen. 3:15; Rom. 16:20; 1 Pet. 1:19; Mark 10:32–45; Matt. 27:46; Rev. 5:12.

#### Quotes

- Nothing hath separated us from God but our own will, or rather our own will is our separation from God. *William Law*
- Christianity is haunted by the theory of a God with a craving for bloody sacrifices. *J.B.S. Haldane*
- By a sort of legal fiction, Jesus was treated as what he was not, in order that we might be treated as what we are not. This is the best device, according to the prevailing theology, that the God of truth, the God of mercy, whose glory is that he is just to men by forgiving their sins, could fall upon for saving his creatures! *George MacDonald*

#### Questions

How does God redeem us? From what to what? What do we make of ideas such as price and penalty? Does God need to pay himself? More importantly, what does this concept of God as Redeemer say about God's nature and character? How does all this fit into the theme of the Great Controversy?

#### Bible summary

In Rom. 1:18 Paul speaks about God's wrath being revealed from heaven against godless people. What does this mean in the context of God as Redeemer? Gen. 3:15 reminds us of the enmity between the Devil and humanity, and the need for redemption that God will accomplish (see Rom. 16:20). 1 Pet. 1:19 tells us we are not redeemed by any gold or silver or way of living, but by the death of Jesus. In Mark 10:32–45 we are given the story of Jesus' crucifixion, and in Matt. 27:46 the "cry of dereliction" Jesus gives. Finally in Rev. 5:12 we have the song, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain."

#### Comment

The concept of God as our Savior and Redeemer is key to our salvation and obviously this means everything to us. But beyond our salvation God was demonstrating truth and answering objections on a cosmic scale. This is a vital perspective as we look at what happened on the Cross.

Additionally, we can so misunderstand the concept of the Atonement that we can place ourselves on the side of the Devil in misrepresenting God. The way some Christians have described God is to paint him in the colors of the Enemy—a vindictive, hostile, angry Deity intent on destroying us unless he receives payment in blood. The atonement as so described appears to be no different to the appeasement of some pagan god who demands blood as a condition of blessing. No wonder the heathen nations described in the Old Testament are so categorically condemned by the true God, since their sacrificial system completely misrepresented what he was trying to teach his people. Because of such perverted thinking, even God's people ended up in performing human

sacrifice. How tragic that Jesus' death on the cross is portrayed in similar terms—a human sacrifice designed to placate the wrath of an angry and terrifying God!

A major aspect here is seeing God as imposing a penalty for transgression rather than understanding that sin brings its own consequences. For example, note these words of New England preacher Jonathan Edwards, “It is requisite that God should punish all sin with infinite punishment; because all sin, as it is against God, is infinitely heinous, and has infinite demerit, is justly infinitely hateful to him, and so stirs up infinite abhorrence and indignation in him.”

Does God come in and exact an arbitrary punishment for those who disobey, or does our sin separate us from God and eventually kill us? These are vital questions. For God did not say “In the day you eat the fruit you will be executed.” The death comes from separating ourselves from the source of life. We die, and God does not kill us.

So when we see God as Redeemer it makes no sense to think that God as Redeemer is paying anything to another member of the Godhead. Nor is any “part of God” pouring out retribution on any other “part of God” so that he can be satisfied/appeased/propiated. The sacrifice of redemption is for us, not for God.

In the words of Steve Chalke, “By focusing simply on God’s wrath and appeasement through the cross we paint a distorted picture of God’s character. We portray him as someone bent on retribution rather than someone who loves us deeply but who is upset by our actions... In the end, if you believe in penal substitution, the cross is not primarily about God’s love, but about God’s anger.”

The concept of God as Redeemer is fundamental to an understanding of the atonement and the nature of God. The many perspectives that have been given in the two millennia since Jesus’ death illustrate the challenges of a definitive answer, and some of the more extreme ideas are clearly wrong! Our society, like every society before it, has a sense of estrangement, and the need to be “made one” once more, and this is reflected in songs and movies, in art and literature. The issue though is not well understood, and there are many mistaken ideas about atonement. God concepts are very much at stake here, with much maligning of his character, even speaking evil of God.

God came to be one with us so that we might become one with him. This is the truth of God the Redeemer. He came to reveal the truth about God, to be our salvation, to answer the questions in the cosmic conflict. And by coming, he restores the relationship based on love and trust that was lost. Relating to God is not a question of rules and regulations, a “salvation system.” It’s about returning to the right relationship with God and his principles, recognizing the truth of all he says and all he does, and wanting to live that way too. In order to become like this we need to be totally changed. The problem is that we are like so many religious people down through time who become preoccupied with behavior instead of dealing with our real nature. We think that if we can only act rightly then all is well, when in fact we need to *be* right before we can *act* right. This is the real truth of the atonement: that as we are one in Christ we become one with God, and rise to walk in newness of life.

### **Ellen White Comments**

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 which 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 the heavenly intelligences, in the sign 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 have His only-begotten Son to die for us. {Signs of the Times, May 30, 1893}

Christ's death shows us God's great love for man. It is the pledge of our salvation. To remove the cross from the Christian would be like blotting out the sun. The cross brings us near to God, reconciling us to him.... Through the cross we learn that our Heavenly Father loves us with an infinite and undying love, and draws us to him with more than a mother's yearning sympathy for a wayward child. {Review and Herald, April 29, 1902}

The atonement of Christ is not a mere skillful way to have our sins pardoned; it is a divine remedy for the cure of transgression and the restoration of spiritual health.. Letter 406, 1906. {6BC 1074}

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. {RH, March 9, 1897}

God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. {GC 36}

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice--its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: 'Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto me.' [John 12:31,32] The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in dealing with the rebellion of Satan. {PP, 68, 69}

The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise of bliss. All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God. The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. {Signs of the Times, Dec. 30, 1889}

God Himself was crucified with Christ; for Christ was one with the Father. The Bible Echo, August 6, 1894, {5BC 1108}

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