

## Thoughts on Atonement Statements

### Statement #12

Prerogatives – definition: “special rights or powers”

Mercy = “terrible power to punish sin because it is sin”

lets people have their own way (= wrath) [Q: How is this a “terrible power”?]

Mercy

lets go of condemnation/guilt (=forgiveness)

“yet a power to draw to it the love of humanity”

Another suggestion: DA 764: “the glory of Him who is love will destroy them”

Exodus 33:20 – Moses could only see God’s backside (=wrath); he could not see His face (=mercy or favor) “for no one can see me and live”

God’s mercy is powerful—to draw us or “destroy” us (cf. Rom. 2:4-6)

“Justice is enabled to forgive without sacrificing one jot of its exalted holiness.”

Justice does what is right. It is right to forgive sin when the truth about sin and its consequences have been fully unmasked.

Without Jesus demonstrating to us that sin (not God) leads to death, would we ever really turn away from it [=repentance]?

Or, would we fear God, seek His favor, secretly turning away from Him in distrust and still cling to our sins because we see God—not sin—as the problem to be solved?

“Justice and Mercy stood apart, in opposition to each other, separated by a wide gulf.”

Why does she capitalize them? Are they personifications of God the Father and God the Son? If so, then what about Jesus’ prayer in John 17—that He and the Father are One *before* the cross?

What drove mercy and justice apart? Answer: DA 762 (p. 14). Satan claimed that they were in opposition, but Jesus showed that they were not. How did He do this?

“It saw One equal with God bearing the penalty for all injustice and sin.”

And what did it see? God executing His Son or Himself in His Son?

No, it saw Jesus dying as a result of sin with His Father’s face being hidden.

### Statement #13

Justice demands a) that sin be pardoned and b) that the death penalty must be executed.

And who executes the death penalty?

“We cannot know how much we owe to Christ for the peace and protection which we enjoy. It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan. The disobedient and unthankful have great reason for gratitude for God’s mercy and longsuffering in holding in check the cruel, malignant power of the evil one. But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed. God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejecters of His mercy to themselves, to reap that

which they have sown. Every ray of light rejected, every warning despised or unheeded, every passion indulged, every transgression of the law of God, is a seed sown which yields its unfailing harvest. The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner, and then there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan. The destruction of Jerusalem is a fearful and solemn warning to all who are trifling with the offers of divine grace and resisting the pleadings of divine mercy. Never was there given a more decisive testimony to God's hatred of sin and to the certain punishment that will fall upon the guilty." GC 36.

"Christ exhausted the penalty and provided a pardon"  
-exhaust means to "draw out" or "develop completely"

How did Jesus' demonstration that sin leads to death provide a pardon?

Answer: Would we want (really want) a pardon if we did not believe that sin is lethal?  
God is the Forgiver – it is His nature to forgive.

Let's draw two scenarios:

**A.** John hurt Frank's youngest son, and Frank is angry at John for hurting his child. John is afraid of what Frank may do to him for hurting his son, so in fear, he begs Frank to forgive him. Frank says, "Before I can forgive you, I must unleash my punishment and assuage my anger. So I will treat my eldest son the way you deserve to be treated. You deserve death, so I will put my eldest son to death in your place. In doing so, I will be inflicting the penalty on myself (because I love my eldest son) and will thus assuage my anger. Frank does this, is reconciled to John because of it, and can now forgive him.

**Q:** What or Who is the problem here? John or Frank?

What is forgiveness in this scenario?

Can John be close to Frank now? Why or why not?

Can Frank get close to John? Why or why not?

Now let's draw this scenario:

**B.** John hurts Frank's youngest son because he believed lies someone told him about Frank. Frank is grieved that John would so hurt himself by hurting Frank's son. Yes, he also grieves over his son's hurt. But in love, it hurts him to see someone he loves reject friendship. He longs to forgive John, but he knows that mere forgiveness would not heal the damage John did to himself. Of course, John feels guilty, but that is more because he fears he has made Frank angry and doesn't want to feel his wrath. John lacks a sense of the enormity of what he did to Frank's son, to Frank, and even to himself. He fails to see how opposite his deed was to Frank's love for him, and how destructive it was to John himself. So Frank talks it over with his eldest son, and his eldest son says, "Dad, let me bear the sin John did against my brother; let me bear the hurt he did to you, and the hurt against himself. Let me show John that you aren't angry at him for

any personal reasons, but that sin itself is evil and destructive to love and trust, and ultimately to life itself and that that is why you hate it. Let me show John your love and how I can save him from sin and its destructive consequences through winning him back to love and trust again. Frank's eldest son does this for John. How will John feel when he sees this demonstration of the consequences of his sin and Frank's love for him? Would it not lead him to repentance, to loathe what he did to Frank's youngest son? Would it not lead him to turn away from ever wanting to do that sin again? Would he not long for John's forgiveness *and* immediately get assurance that a friend who loved him so much would most certainly forgive him?

**Q:** What/Who is the problem here—John or Frank?

Can John be close to Frank now? Can Frank get close to John?

This second scenario is equal to the last part of #14. Jesus' death leads us to see sin in all its awfulness, as the essence of force itself, and as causing the death of Christ and leading to death. At the same time, it leads us to see that God is not in the killing business but the saving business. He seeks to save us from what will destroy us.

**#14** – see 1 John 1:9 – justice forgives

**#15** – cf. *DA* 761 (p. 10)

**#16** – See #15. This is very similar to #12 above. Based on *GC* 36 (above), we can conclude that the longer God, in His mercy and through His power restrains evil, the more terrible will be the results once He lets evil go and removes His restraint on it.

**#17** – See #26. What caused the agonies of the garden of Gethsemane? Sin. Who caused the insult, the mockery, the abuse heaped upon Jesus? The Jews who rejected Him and Satan. Who caused the horrors and ignominy of the crucifixion? The Romans. Were these God's justice? In what way? Does this mean that they did the right thing to abuse Jesus?

Last sentence: "not spared" but given over to this abuse just as God will "let go" the wicked to turn on one another and abuse one another? God will not excuse...but will let us have our choice and its consequences.

**#18** – Equals #13 above.

**#19** – Why? Because Jesus showed unequivocally that sin destroys sinners. Re-read *DA* 764:1, 2. God can't take people to heaven in their sins because sin would destroy the happiness, love, and freedom of all to say nothing of the fact that sin would destroy them.

**#20** – This statement helps us to shift from a legal framework to a moral framework.

- #21** – 1) Why did Justice demand the sufferings of a man?  
2) Why did the Substitute need to be perfect (need no atonement)?  
3) Why did Christ give the sufferings of a God?

If the atonement is a legal means by which we are forgiven, why wouldn't it be possible for each human being to suffer a determined amount of time, die, and then be resurrected for eternally? Would he or she not have *legally* done their punishment? Early on Christianity developed a belief in Purgatory, a few that became a full-fledged dogma in 1245-1445 (Councils in Lyon and Florence and the Council of Trent).

#### Legally Speaking

- 1) Justice demanded that human beings die. If a Substitute dies, a human being dies. Sin is appropriately punished.
- 2) If the Substitute needed atonement and could do the atonement for Himself and us, then the doctrine of Purgatory would be valid.
- 3) If the Substitute needs no atonement, then, as a sinless sacrifice, the Substitute was not atoning for His own sins but for the sins of others.

#### Morally and Spiritually Speaking (Not Legally)

- 1) Sin lead to suffering and ultimately to death. Divine justice rests upon the law and the way the law works (inherent and inevitable consequences). Therefore justice (as in the law) does "demand" that cause-and-effect play out and that sin lead to death.
- 2) If the Substitute does not need to atone for His own sins because He is sinless, then His atonement truly is all "for us" and not for God. It is our sins that require atonement if we are to be saved.
- 3) If the substitute had to make atonement for himself, it would not be clear that sin inevitably leads to death. What caused him to die, would still be the question raised. And even if the Substitute were only human but sinless, his death would not fully answer the question, who or what caused him to die. But if the Substitute were both human and divine, the question would forever be settled about what caused His death. If God Himself enters into human flesh and experiences the consequences of sin, then it is settled. Satan can't claim that God doesn't know the truth or that God had manipulated things so that He has killed Himself.

**#22** – This statement elicits several questions:

- 1) What makes a sacrifice of "sufficient value"?
- 2) What does it mean to "fully satisfy the claims of God's perfect law"? What are the claims of the law?
- 3) Why would angels be of less value than the law?
- 4) Why were no requirements laid on Christ?
- 5) What is the significance of the statement: "He had power to lay down His life, and to take it again."
- 6) How does the fact that Christ voluntarily took on the atonement explain the above statement? Why did Christ need to make a voluntary sacrifice in order to satisfy the claims of the law?

Answers:

1) Would not something would be of sufficient value if it accomplished what it was intended to do? What, then, was it intended to accomplish?

2) The rest of the first sentence is often found in legal explanations of the atonement. It is a core of Reformation views on the death of Christ. What are the “claims of the law”? It would be what the law demands. What does it demand? If we look at it as a legal document, its demands would be perfect compliance with the rules. If we see it, as Paul does in Romans 13:8-10, as the law of love, then it demands that we perfectly love God supremely and one another as ourselves. What if that law is broken? Again, if the law is merely a legal set of rules, then if broken, the law would demand execution at the hands of the Lawgiver. If the law is the law of love, when broken, it would demand the results of living a loveless life, which is death, since “the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven” (DA 20). Complete separation from God’s self-renouncing love is death.

3) All of God’s creatures are amenable to the law of love because they cannot love apart from being loved. All love from parent to child, friend to friend, one human being to another is mediated through the love of God, the Source and Embodiment of love. God’s love endures where angels and human beings fail to love.

4) No requirements were laid upon Christ because He is love itself and He is the Source of love. “Love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority” (DA 22). The basic requirement the law lays on us at its heart is to respond to the drawing power of God’s love in Christ. If requirements were laid on Christ, He would not be the Embodiment and Source of love and love would be mechanically contrived in a legal construct.

5) As the Source and Embodiment of love, Christ is the Lifegiver (remember that God’s love is life). Therefore as its Source and Creator, Christ can lay down His life and take it up again. His death, therefore, is completely voluntary and thus in harmony with His love.

6) Because Christ’s sacrifice was voluntary, it was done out of His love. Since such love has nothing to do with force and is, indeed, its antithesis, Jesus’ life of love and His death of self-sacrifice were of sufficient value to rescue human beings.

It is helpful to read the entire article in which this paragraph is found. In several paragraphs later, Ellen White states: “This Saviour was to be a mediator, to stand between the Most High and his people. Through this provision, a way was opened whereby the guilty sinner might find access to God through the mediation of another. The sinner could not come in his own person with his guilt upon him, and with no greater merit than he possessed in himself. Christ alone could open the way by making an offering equal to the demands of the divine law [= love]. He was perfect and undefiled by sin [=opposite of love]. He was without spot or blemish. **The extent of the terrible consequences of sin could never have been known, had not the remedy provided been of infinite value.** The salvation of fallen man was procured at such an immense cost that angels marveled, and could not fully comprehend the divine mystery that the majesty of Heaven, equal with God, should die for the rebellious race.” The statement in bold adds the dimension that Jesus’ death met the claims of the law in that sin nets terrible consequences that culminate in death. Only God could make that clear by dying in the Person of His Son.

**#23** – The obvious background to this statement is that Satan claimed the right to retain his captives as his. But he gained his captives “by a lie framed against the government of God.” His most direct lie involved the claim that human beings would not die if they ate the fruit. This lie seems to counter his real belief about divine justice and mercy unless he believed that God would merely forgive the first humans and bring sin wholesale into Paradise. Read DA 761 (Commentary p. 10). Both this lie and his perception—that justice was inconsistent with mercy; that should the law be broken sinners could not be pardoned; that every sin must meet its punishment; if God should remit the punishment of sin, He would not be a God of truth and justice—were refuted by Christ’s death. How? Jesus’ death showed that sin—not God—leads to death resolving his outright lie that sinners would not die. For how it refuted his views of divine justice and mercy, reread DA 761-762 (Commentary, p. 12). She reasons here descriptively rather than legally. Reread DA 762:1 (Commentary, p. 13).

Note that we have forgiveness through the forbearance of God. What Jesus obviously does here is *demonstrate the truth* about the nature of God’s law, what it means to obey, how we can obey (through modeling His love and how it connects Him to His Father), how He can enable us to obey (through imbuing us with the attributes of God’s character). This cannot happen unless we see the truth about God fully in Jesus’ life and death. Perhaps we do not realize fully how significant it was that Jesus perfectly obeyed God’s law of love. By doing so, He worked out the full kingdom of God’s ways—internalized truth, trust, and love—in opposition to Satan’s ways of force, arbitrary measures, and contrived compliance. In other words, Jesus had to show that our way to obedience reflected Satan’s lies about God. We obey from fear, under a threat of punishment, because we have to, we are obligated to in response to being forgiven. But this borders on mere compliance without understanding why we are to obey. We do not have an intelligent appreciation of God’s ways so that we do what is right because we understand how right it is. We do not reject sin because we see what it does to us and to others, and what it will ultimately lead to. The kind of obedience, Jesus offers us is one that springs from intelligent understanding of His character. It means that we love because He first loved us; His love has awakened in us love for Him and correspondingly, love for others. It means we trust Him because He has demonstrated that He can be trusted and most importantly that it is not He who will hurt us but sin and its consequences. It means that we have internalized the truth about Him and that truth has set us to be our truest selves—what He intended us to be by creation.

By showing what obedience really is, the nature of His ways, and what He is really like, Jesus demonstrated that He could set Satan’s captives free by means of the truth (John 8:32). Thus He won the right to deliver us all from Satan’s and sin’s power.

**#24** – This highly metaphorical statement is packed with meaning. Note that sinners are *drawn* to repentance by Christ on the cross. The shift here is from human beings to God, but it is initiated and created by Christ’s death. Then she shifts to Justice (personified here) and says that Jesus’ death satisfied justice which equals “satisfy the claims of the broken law.” So satisfying justice and satisfying the claims of the broken law is one in the same thing. Interestingly here, she equates Christ’s gushing blood, *broken* body with the *broken* law. Literally, Christ’s body was not broken at all (John 19:36). What she is doing metaphorically is suggesting that Jesus suffered the consequences of the broken law. This metaphoric

understanding works best if we understand that those consequences are inevitable. When love is broken it breaks the body. And truly Jesus suffered a broken heart when ripped from His Father by bearing sin and its separation. Her reference to the “gushing blood” would likely be the blood coming from the spear thrust into His side, which, in *The Desire of Ages*, she uses as evidence of His broken heart.

Note the next metaphor: “He bridges the gulf which sin has made.” Note what has created that gulf. It is not God’s holiness nor His justice. It is sin.

Her next metaphor is striking: Jesus suffered like this so that “He might cover the defenseless sinner.” She uses language that suggests that we are victims of sin and its abuse, and views us the way God does as wounded, broken, and defenseless. Defenseless against what or whom? Against an angry Father? No, this is not in Ellen White’s theology (see *GC* 416, 417, 484, 485). We are defenseless against Satan and His claims against us, claims that only Jesus can meet. She has this in mind in her next sentence: “The victory gained at His death on Calvary broke forever the accusing power of Satan over the universe and silenced his charges that self-denial was impossible with God and therefore not essential in the human family.” Compare this with Revelation 12: 10: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God” (NRSV).

Note also the equation she makes between the silencing of Satan’s charges that “self-denial was impossible with God” with “therefore not essential in the human family.” The most natural way of looking at this statement is to assume that Satan claimed that since God Himself could not practice self-denial, therefore human beings didn’t have to either. But I believe there’s more to these words than that. Human beings can only become self-denying (unselfish) beings as they see that in God. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19, NRSV). These two “if—then” elements are therefore inextricably part of a perfect whole that cannot be broken because it belongs to descriptive law.

The next paragraph raises a question. Why did Christ need to be sinless in order for his death to be of value in procuring grace for the sinner? One clue is the end of that sentence, that if Jesus were not sinless, His death would not have been more valuable than any other sinful human. The obvious assumption here is that a sinner cannot atone for his or her sins by dying. In a legal construct, this would not seem true. Why can’t a person pay the price for their own sins and make up for them? This concept led the Christian Church to practice penance, buy indulgences, and look forward to purgatory where one could atone for one’s sins. But if the moral law is descriptive, a person who sins dies as an inevitable and natural result of sin, and such a death does not “atone” for anything. It is not the nature of things that it could.

Other factors exist that also make Jesus’ sinlessness a necessity for His death to have value. Reviewing pages 4-8 of the commentary on *The Desire of Ages*, ch. 79, had Jesus sinned, He would have submitted to Satan’s dominion of force. This implies something I’ve slowly been coming to, that every sin is, in some way, either a form of force or submission to a form of force. (Think about the Ten Commandments: idolatry usually involves glorifying power and violence in some way; killing is using force to remove life; stealing is taking by force what someone has; etc. Then think about it this way: anything contrary to love, truth, and trust is by its nature forceful.) So by sinning, Jesus would have given Satan the upper hand and justified his

entire rebellion. Satan would have proved that force is a greater power than love, truth, and trust.

Another important factor is the fact that if a sinful human were to die the final death, it would not be clear that that death was the inevitable result of sin (review *DA* 764, p. 21). In Ellen White's understanding, it was the inevitability of the death of Jesus that settled the great controversy over God's character and thus enabled us to be saved. The death of a sinner simply could not demonstrate that.

The final lines of the paragraph above suggest the union between Christ as God and Christ as Human. They also suggest a union between His roles as sacrificial victim and high priest. Such a union makes the most sense in a construct in which the truth about God must be revealed in order for sinners to be saved.

The final paragraph makes a very important summary statement. It infers that God communicated freely His grace to Adam and Eve before the Fall. This is using "grace" in its broadest sense. The word "grace" in New Testament Greek means "gift." Grace was exercised in the Garden of Eden when humanity partook of food, lived surrounded in natural beauty, with every need supplied freely, and enjoyed open, direct communication with God.

Why did God suspend "the free communication of grace to the human family"? Because He was offended and needed to show His displeasure? Because His holiness abhorred their sinfulness and would not permit them closeness to Him, like parents who disown a rebellious child? Because His justice demanded such separation? We need to ask, In what sense would any of this be true? Or is it more appropriate and true to say that God suspended this "free communication of grace" because His human family now distrusted Him *without cause, because they believed lies about Him*? And such paranoia of God broke off God's ability to reason together with humanity and win it back to love and trust. The conditions, then, that Christ fulfilled was to destroy the lies that brought distrust and provide the truth that could draw human beings back to Him (cf. *DA* 761-762, p. 12). If God's gracious face would consume the sinner, how could He freely exercise grace? The kind of grace sinful human beings want from God is something that will not make it necessary to surrender to the divine sovereignty of love, a love that will transform their minds, but will enable them to retain their selfish hearts and their own self-righteous anger because the god who gives such grace resembles them. The barriers broken down are the barriers to human hearts, those who have seen God through the darkest glass, but now see Him as He really is and, led to repentance by His goodness, have come to love and trust Him.

**#25** This statement gives us a dimension we need. The death of Jesus was needed for the entire universe because the whole universe was affected to some degree, though they did not fall, by Satan's charges against God. Note the three things that Jesus' death accomplished and note the order in which she places them: 1) the beneficence of the divine government, 2) the nature and result of sin made plain, and 3) the perpetuity of the law fully demonstrated. Note that all three of these things were brought about "through the revelation of the character of God in Christ." We can draw from this that what Jesus revealed was that God's government truly rested on love, truth, and trust and that obedience to the law of love (equals becoming loving people internally) is beneficial to humanity; indeed the law of love is the law of life (*DA* 20). Furthermore, by His death, Jesus demonstrated that any alternative to love, truth, and



trust leads to death. Said another way, He fully showed that His government, resting on love, truth, and trust, was the only way to maintain life, freedom, good will, peace, and happiness. The law of love, therefore, is eternal and it can never change. Even more, Jesus' death revealed that breaking the law of love inevitably leads to death; thus the law of love was indeed descriptive and thus unchanging.

The next paragraph suggests that Satan claimed God's law of love was faulty. To substantiate it, Satan made several charges against God: 1) God desired to exalt Himself (*DA* 22; 2) God did not practice self-denial (the core ingredient of love that makes it unselfish; see statement #24), 3) God was unforgiving and severe (*DA* 22), and 4) God's justice and mercy were in conflict so that He could not be just and merciful at the same time (*DA* 761-763). In his attempt to manufacture improvements on God's government, he turned to external control, trying to make a system that would make people appear good while internally, their hearts were evil.

The final lines of the second paragraph create a doxology, reflecting the perceptions of those who know God as He really is and have responded to His love. They serve to remind us of the word "worthy" used in the seven-stanza hymn of Revelation: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created" (4:11). "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (5:12). The term worthy implies that worship is truly *worth-ship*, bestowed not out of abject fear, or from obligation, or from duty. Worth implies a testing of the heart that brings out the demonstration of the evidence that someone is truly what is claimed for him or her. God's worthiness means that He has shown amply that He *deserves* our love, trust, and worship without pretending, forcing ourselves to worship Him, or manufacture a form of obedience without the internal response to His love.

In the third paragraph, Ellen White points out that only Jesus' death could "expiate" human sin. To expiate is to make amends, make up for something bad. Since human sinfulness is the result of believing Satan's lies about God, sin, and the nature of the law, only Jesus' death really revealed the truth about each of these things. Jesus' death showed that God's love was indeed self-sacrificing and unselfish; it showed "the nature and result of sin" (first paragraph) and thus that God was not the arbitrary destroyer; rather sin destroyed sinners; it demonstrated that God's law was descriptive and thus unchanging.

**#26** All but the last paragraph of this statement is clear and fits well with her understanding. The final paragraph raises a couple of questions: 1) What does it mean to accept Christ as our righteousness? 2) Why could transgression of the law be forgiven only through the sacrifice of Christ?

The first question relates to the imputation (imputing) of Christ's righteousness to us. Note this example:

"The Lord imputes unto the believer the righteousness of Christ and pronounces him righteous before the universe. He transfers his sins to Jesus, the sinner's representative, substitute, and surety. Upon Christ He lays the iniquity of every soul that believeth." *1SM* 392

Most people view this through a transactional lens: Jesus took our sins; we accept His righteousness. What does this mean, though, in practical experience?

Perhaps we need to look at this through the lens, Ellen White gives it in this very statement. “The Lord” (meaning God the Father?) imputes unto the believer the righteousness of Christ and pronounces him righteous *before the universe*. It is God the Father who pronounces us righteous to the universe not Christ to the Father. This reminds us that God runs a consensual government in which every last member of His loyal, intelligent creation must be persuaded about every issue on the weight of evidence. That means that our guardian angel, who knows us so well, must be convinced that Satan’s accusations against us (see Zech. 3; *GC* 416, 417, 484, 485) are invalid and false. The angels and other intelligent beings in the universe recognize that Jesus’ life and death demonstrated the basis and means by which sinful human beings can be rescued from tyranny of sin and Satan’s kingdom of force. Jesus’ righteous life stands for ours because it demonstrates what we can become through knowing Him, coming to love Him in response to His love, and to trust Him because we find Him to be trustworthy. What makes this all possible is Jesus’ revelation of the character of the Father. For this reason, she rephrases these heavy Latin terms “imputed” and “imparted” in the following paragraph, taken from her article, “God Made Manifest,” in *Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890:

Christ came to save fallen man, and Satan with fiercest wrath met him on the field of conflict; for the enemy knew that when divine strength was added to human weakness, man was armed with power and intelligence, and could break away from the captivity in which he had bound him. Satan sought to intercept every ray of light from the throne of God. He sought to cast his shadow across the earth, that men might lose the true views of God’s character, and that the knowledge of God might become extinct in the earth. He had caused truth of vital importance to be so mingled with error that it had lost its significance. The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary. He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. **The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes.** That men might have salvation he came directly to man, and became a partaker of his nature.

We will have more to say about this later, but for now, “to set someone right” is God imputing Christ’s righteousness to them which they accept. And to “keep someone right” is for God to impart the same righteousness to them so that their lives become wholly transformed. More simply, the love and goodness of God that leads us to repentance, confession, forgiveness and trust is the same love of God that transforms us into His image.

The second question above—why could we be forgiven only through Christ’s sacrifice—we have already answered. Without the full revelation of the character of God and of the nature and consequences of sin, without establishing the fact that the law of love, relational and

descriptive as it is, cannot be changed, we cannot be won fully back to God. We are not likely to fully accept His forgiveness or appreciate His righteous character without the knowledge that Jesus' death came to give us.

So now we have worked our way through statements that have challenged us and made us rethink our explanations for why Jesus had to die. Why should we believe that all of Ellen White's statements can be harmonized? And why does it take so much more explanation to do this than to merely accept them through a legal lens? Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3, NRSV). Jeremiah said, "Thus says the Lord: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth for in these things I delight, says the Lord" (9:23, 24, NRSV).

If God runs His government on the basis of evidence for love, truth, and trust, and if sin is the result of believing lies about Him, then does it not make sense that we would need to harmonize statements wherever inspiration works. Neither the Bible writers nor Ellen White wrote systematic theology. Here they spoke one way; there another to try to reach all of us whose minds have been darkened by Satan's lies. The exercise of attempting to understand it all strengthens our minds, increases our trust in God, and deepens our love for Him and prepares us to meet whatever would seek to draw us away from Him.