

The Cross – The Work of Jesus Christ

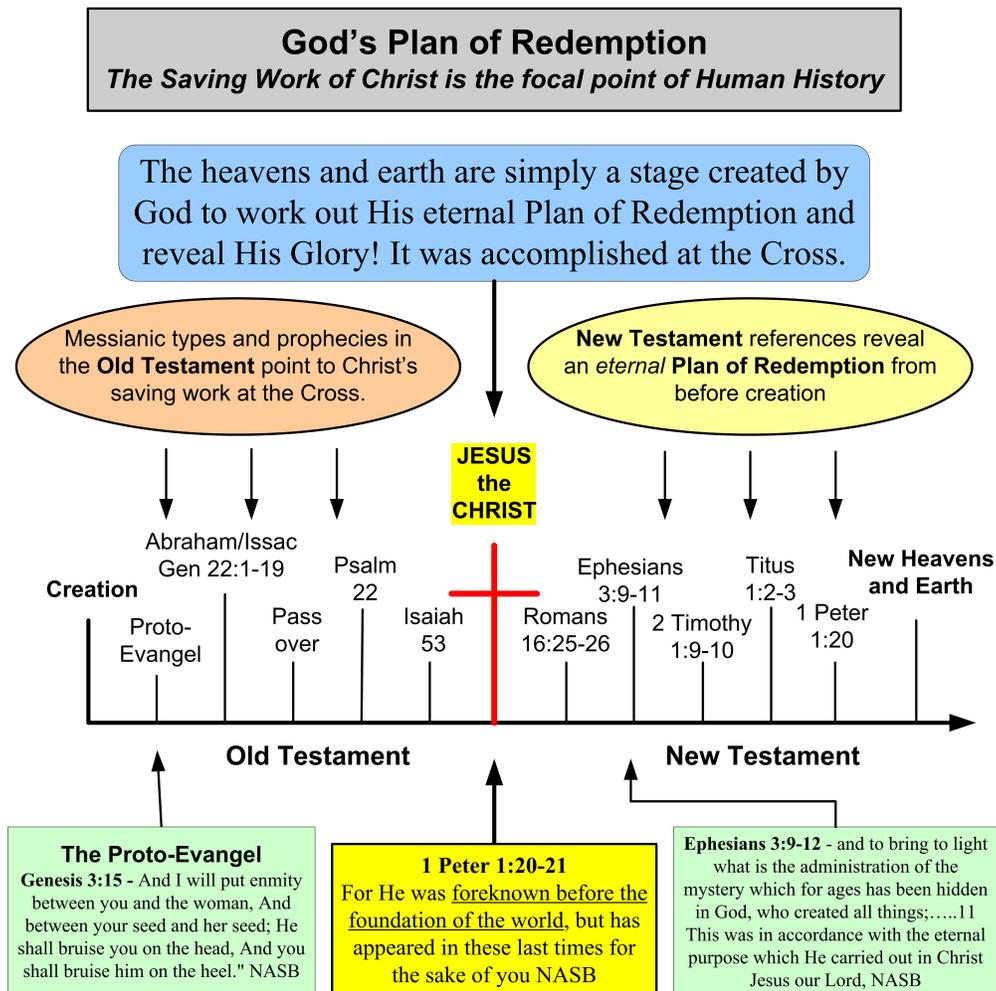
The Atonement – Salvation Accomplished

The Cross – What Happened There?

In the beginning of our lesson on The Savoir, The Person of Jesus Christ, we discussed the fact that God had created the world to display His glory through His work of Providence in and through History. Further that the Bible is a *“unified whole”* narrative recording for us the history of God’s work of redemption in the world. This unified whole we refer to as **“REDEMPTIVE HISTORY.”** That is, the History of Redemption, which is the *primary* purpose of God in the creation of the world and mankind. Since this Redemption is the main theme of the narrative of the Bible, we find the redeeming work of Jesus Christ and His person, who is the Savior of the world, to be the focal point of all of human history.

Galatians 4:4-5 - 4 But **when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son**, born of a woman, born under the Law, **5 in order that He might redeem** those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. NASB

Jesus Christ is the focus of the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments. He is the Savior of the world, and *His saving work was accomplished at the Cross of Calvary*. Consider then, that in the course of history, God’s purpose to redeem fallen mankind from their sin by sending His Son Jesus Christ into the world to give His life as a *“sacrifice”* and be raised from the dead, is *primary* among all the things which God has purposed to do. This is God’s Plan of Redemption!



This Plan of Redemption opens up a whole new understanding for us then concerning God's activity in directing the events of History. We see then and therefore ***that Jesus Christ and His atoning work at the Cross become the very focal point of history***, and thus the key event in the history of the world, and this by the eternal plans of God Himself. God planned to crucify Jesus on the Cross from before the creation of the world.

Acts 2:22-23 - 22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know, 23 **this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross** by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. NASB

So when we think about the Cross of Jesus Christ the Savior, we must understand that He is not just some Galilean peasant in history who did some good things and had some wise teachings, but rather He is God very God, incarnate as a man, accomplishing the *primary* work of the eternal plans of God which were made before the creation of the world.

1 Peter 1:18-20 – 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For **He was foreknown before the foundation of the world**, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you NASB

Therefore when we consider the Cross of Christ, we must realize that there the perfect plans of the perfect God, plans to save mankind from sin, have found their fulfillment. More than this, that Jesus the Christ is that God Himself, come to earth for this great purpose, to save His people from their sins. And that is exactly what He has done!

Matthew 1:21 – 21 And she will bear a Son; and **you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.**" NASB

2 Timothy 1:8-10 - 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 **who has saved us**, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but **according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity**, 10 but now has been revealed **by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel**. NASB

Because the Cross is the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption, it is absolutely sufficient to accomplish the ends for which God planned it. The redemption that was obtained by God in Christ at the Cross was altogether sublime and magnanimous, it was a display of divine wisdom and love beyond wonder and filled with amazement! ***The Cross was, as some have said, the blazing center of the Glory of God!*** It was there that all of the attributes of God become crystal clear for all to see, and that they reach red hot intensity! O Sovereign Love, Oh blessed mercy! At the Cross divine justice was met and heavenly goodness was poured out like a river! At the Cross God's wrath has been satisfied and sinners have been cleansed, washed and restored to loving fellowship with God once again! The Cross richly affords all the blessing of God for whom He intended it, and they shall be the recipients of it, for God will see to it.

Titus 3:4-7 - 4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, 5 **He saved us**, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 **whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior**, 7 that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life. NASB

In summary, what happened at the Cross was the main event of God's redemptive plan was completed. It is an historical event, an objective fact, a reality of paramount importance. At the Cross, Christ died for sinners, in their place, to redeem them from sin. At the Cross, God's wrath for sin was satisfied by Christ's sacrifice and this reconciled mankind back to God from whom they had been estranged, for all who will embrace it by faith.

Colossians 1:22 -22 yet **He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death**, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach NASB

Defining the Atonement

The Atonement has become a term with many theological implications. It is not just merely a biblical word with a single idea, but has become a term which describes *“the whole scope of Christ’s saving work.”* It is a word describing the salvific or redemptive results arising from Jesus death. Atonement puts forth the idea of reconciliation between God and mankind, and this accomplished solely by the work of God in Christ’s sacrifice. Many have used the description of “at-one-ment” to describe the result of atonement brought about between God and mankind. It therefore has emphasis on the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. It is an English word used by translators in both an Old and New Testaments. The two Old Testament Hebrew words commonly translated as *“atonement,”* [kippur 3725], and [kaphar 3722] carry with them the idea of *“expiation”* (to remove offense or guilt) or to *“cover over.”*

- 3725 – **kippur** – ; expiation, -atonement.
- 3722 – **kaphar** - ; to cover, to expiate or condone, to placate or cancel:-- appease, make (an atonement, cleanse, disannul, forgive, be merciful, pacify, pardon, purge (away), put off, (make) reconcile(-liation).

The New Testament word normally translated as *“propitiation”* is the Greek [hilasterion 2435] and also carries with it the idea of *“expiation”* (to remove offense or guilt) or to *“cover over.”* In fact, the Greek term actually holds a more personal meaning to the means of expiation, namely that of *“an atoning victim”* or the actual sacrifice of atonement.

- 2435 – **hilasterion** - ; an expiatory (place or thing), an atoning victim, or (specially) the lid of the Ark (in the Temple):--mercy seat, propitiation.

In summary of the use of the biblical words, we can say that although the meaning of the words themselves is rather clear, the idea or concept of the atonement has taken on a theological meaning used to refer to the *“the whole scope of Christ’s saving work.”* In this scope of meaning, there are words which are frequently used to describe the nature, quality and character of the atonement. This is because Christ’s work is so profound, that the Bible uses many terms to describe it. These would be but are not limited to words like;

- **Substitutionary** – in the place of, *“Christ died in our place.”*
- **Vicarious** – in our place, for us, substitution implied personally, *“Christ died for us.”*
- **Propitiatory** – appeasement or satisfaction of God’s wrath toward sin, *“Christ satisfied God’s divine justice and paid the actual debt of our sin.”*
- **Expiatory** – the remove of guilt, *“Christ cancelled out or released us from the debt of sin.”*
- **Justification** – a legal declaration of righteousness, *“Christ justified us before God’s court on the basis of His own merit.”*
- **Sacrifice** – the personal cost to Christ was death in our place, *“Christ was the actual victim of divine justice, he was the sacrifice that died for us.”*
- **Reconciliation** – the restoration of relationship of mankind to God, *“Christ reconciled us to God and repaired the alienation we once had with Him.”*
- **Redemption** - to buy back, to pay the redemption price, *“Christ paid the price demanded by divine justice for our sins.”*
- **Salvific** – of salvation or according to salvation, saving quality, *“Christ saved us.”*

All of these terms deal with and relate to the alienation that has taken place between God and man because of sin. *Sin has brought about the desperate need of mankind to be reconciled to God, lest they be destroyed forever away from the presence of God.* The Bible plainly sets forth the doctrine that man as a sinner is guilty of breaking the law of God, of violating His righteousness. God has, therefore, judicially delivered man over to his own will so that

corruption has entered in, whereby he has lost all desire to serve God.

Romans 5:12 - 12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and **death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned** NASB

This means that man has no ability to save himself, for he does not realize his need nor has he the righteousness to provide atonement for his sin.

1 Corinthians 2:14 - 14 But **a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them**, because they are spiritually appraised. NASB

The atonement is what God has done to reconcile us, and to deal with God's alienation *from us* on account of our sin. God, by taking away sin, removes the ground of this alienation, and peace with God is the effect.

Romans 6:23 - 23 **For the wages of sin is death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. NASB

God was not obligated to save us, redeem us or do anything on our behalf. He was the offended party, and we were and are worthy of eternal wrath because of sin. ***But God because of His great love and mercy, freely chose to redeem us from that which we could not redeem ourselves.***

Grace is favor that God gives, that is unmerited by the recipient, and God is in no way obligated to give it but is free to do as He pleases.

Ephesians 2:4-5 - 4 **But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us**, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), NASB

It must be understood that this saving work of God in the atonement is in fact wholly God's work. The Scripture plainly declares that God reconciled us to Himself, it was His doing.

2 Corinthians 5:18 - 18 Now **all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ**, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, NASB

People cannot save themselves from the desperate plight of sin, because this would cost them the ultimate payment of eternal separation from God. Therefore, if God does not act to save us, we will be hopelessly lost. ***The atonement is what God has done to save us.*** It is the historical events and objective facts of the actual sacrifice that God made on our behalf. The sacrifice of Jesus was the payment of our sin debt and did in fact redeem us and purify us by the removal of our guilt.

Titus 2:14 - 14 who gave Himself for us, **that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession**, zealous for good deeds. NASB

We were, by this atonement sanctified or cleansed from the corruption of sin so that we could be received into the holy presence of the infinitely pure God of Heaven.

Hebrews 10:10, 14 - 10 By this will **we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**..... 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. NASB

Now then let us marvel together at the great things God has done! Let us see the desperate plight from which we have been snatched by the life and death of God Himself! What amazing love is this, that God would come and die in our place.

1 John 4:10 - 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that **He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins**. NASB

It is this amazing love of God that has motivated Him to such actions! And by these things He has in fact worked all of these great works of salvation and reconciliation for us. Consider how Scripture describes these things. They are very profound!

Romans 5:8-10 - 8 But **God demonstrates His own love toward us**, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died **for us**. 9 Much more then, having now **been justified by His blood**, we shall be **saved from the wrath of God** through Him. 10 For if while **we were enemies, we were reconciled to God** through the death of His Son, much more, **having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life**. NASB

Let us respond in an appropriate manner with thanksgiving and praise! Let us rejoice in what God has done for us through Christ Jesus, and give Him the glory due Him!

The Necessity of the Atonement

When we speak about the “*necessity*” of the atonement, it is important to realize that there is more than one issue at hand. *First, mankind has a great “need” to be saved because of sin, and he has an utter inability to save himself.* If God does not act to save mankind from this desperate plight, mankind would be hopelessly lost and destined to perish. This is because of the Holiness of God. God cannot allow sin to go unpunished, His justice will not allow it. If He did He would not be truly just or righteous. But He is in fact righteous, and His nature demands the just satisfaction of the consequences for sin.

Deuteronomy 27:26 - 26 'Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.'

And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' NASB

Romans 1:18-20 - 18 For **the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men**, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, **so that they are without excuse.** NASB

Sin is a violation of the very nature of God which is expressed in the Law of God. By this Law, the whole world has become aware of its desperate plight before God and is now accountable to God.

Romans 3:19-20 - 19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, **that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God**; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; **for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.** NASB

This is the reason why God gave the Law. It was to make it painfully obvious to us that we have violated God’s nature continually, and this has brought death upon us and brought about our great need to be saved from the wrath of God.

Romans 7:12-13 - 12 So then, **the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.** 13 Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of death* for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that **through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.** NASB

The Law also teaches us that God’s standard of righteousness is unattainable for sinners. *This purpose of the Law is to show us our great need for justification before God’s holiness.*

Because we are in such a desperate plight, the Law leads us to the obvious conclusion, that we need a Savior.

Galatians 3:19-22 - 19 **Why the Law then?** It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, **until the seed should come** to whom the promise had been made. 20 Now a mediator is not for one *party only*; whereas God is *only* one. 21 Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For **if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.** 22 But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. NASB

Therefore when we see our utter inability to measure up to or keep the Law of God, we are driven to a hopeless and desperate state in ourselves to meet God’s demands of righteousness.

This then teaches us that we must look outside of ourselves to Christ Jesus to be saved.

Galatians 3:23-24 - 23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. 24 Therefore **the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.** NASB

Therefore is absolutely necessary that mankind have a way to become justified before God. This now is why the atonement is necessary for mankind to be justified before God. Without it mankind is guilty under God’s law and hopelessly awaiting His fearful judgment which His nature demands. God cannot be violated by sin without reacting to it according to His nature. Consider how John Murray has expressed this.... “*Sin is the contradiction of God and He must react against it with holy indignation. This is to say that sin MUST meet with divine judgment. It is this inviolable sanctity of God’s law, the immutable dictate of holiness and the unflinching*

demand of justice, that makes mandatory the conclusion that salvation from sin without expiation and propitiation is inconceivable. It is this principle that explains the sacrifice of the Lord of glory, the agony of Gethsemane, and the abandonment of the accursed tree. It is this principle that under girds the great truth that God is just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. For in the work of Christ the dictates of holiness and the demands of justice have been fully vindicated. God set Him forth to be a propitiation to declare His righteousness.”

These ideas illustrate another aspect of the “*necessity*” of the atonement. ***Secondly, if God decides to save mankind, there becomes a “need” for the means by which God will do it.*** Because mankind cannot provide a way for himself to be justified before God, having violated Gods Law and become accountable to him, God must now act to save mankind, or they will perish. Now concerning this matter, there are two views about the necessity of the atonement.

- **Hypothetical Necessity** – This view was held by good men in the church such as Augustine, Aquinas, and even Calvin for many centuries. It is the idea that God has no necessity to save mankind by means of the vicarious substitution of Christ, but could have used other means to bring about atonement. But God in His wisdom chose to use the means of the atonement of Christ, to save mankind because it was the way in which the greatest number of advantages concur and in which grace is most marvelously exhibited. In other words, the Cross was not absolutely necessary to be the means of salvation, but the means that God chose to use by His own sovereign decree.
- **Absolute Necessity** – This view is the classic protestant view held by such men as Turretin, RL Dabney, Berkhof, Murray and both A.A. and Charles Hodge. In this view, the atonement is seen as necessary because God had purposed by His free and sovereign grace to save mankind in His decree, and because of His perfect nature, vicarious sacrifice was the only means by which it could be brought about. Murray states, “*while it was not inherently necessary for God to save, yet, since salvation had been purposed, it was necessary to secure this salvation through a satisfaction that could be rendered only substitutionary sacrifice and blood-bought redemption.*”

Concerning these two views of the necessity of the atonement one might ask, why does it matter? The answer to this question is of paramount importance, as to see the infinite value of the Cross of our blessed Savior. Why did Christ die? Was it absolutely necessary? Could some other person have achieved this great salvation? Might we have been saved some other way, or was this just a “*hypothetical*” set of circumstances that God chose to use of which He had many choices? On these questions we shall look to the Scripture. It is rather clear in the text of Scripture that the atonement of Christ was in fact the only means by which salvation could be obtained. In Hebrews chapter 2 we see that in order for Christ to “*make propitiation*” or satisfaction for divine justice, and also to be merciful to mankind, “***He had to be made like His brethren in all things.***”

Hebrews 2:17 - 17 Therefore, **He had to be made like His brethren in all things**, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. NASB

More than this, because of the infinite perfections of God, we needed a high priest that was undefiled and without blemish so that He could die for the sins of others and not His own sins.

Hebrews 7:26-27 - 26 For **it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;** 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. NASB

Also, we needed an undefiled high priest who could enter the tabernacle in heaven, and sprinkle the mercy seat there, in the presence of the Holy God, once for all.

Hebrews 9:23-24 - 23 Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but **the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these**. 23 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, **but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;** NASB

The sacrifice of Christ was absolutely necessary because it is impossible for the blood of goats and bulls to take away sins.

Hebrews 10:4-7 - For **it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins**. 5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING THOU HAST NOT DESIRED, **BUT A BODY THOU HAST PREPARED FOR ME; 6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN THOU HAST TAKEN NO PLEASURE**. 7 "THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE ROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO THY WILL, O GOD.'" NASB

Because of God's inviolable holiness and perfection, in order to be accepted by Him a person must be holy and righteous. Because all mankind have sinned, they cannot therefore be accepted by God without a justification **brought about by God Himself**. He must be "*the justifier*," and this justification must be of such quality that it actually provides and infinitely perfect righteousness for the person being justified. This can only be provided by a vicarious substitute, since mankind can in no way become this. This is why the redemption in Christ is absolutely necessary.

Romans 3:25-26 - 25 whom **God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood** through faith. *This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;* 26 for **the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness** at the present time, **that He might be just and the justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus. NASB

Further, this atonement is absolutely necessary to be the supreme display of the love of God and the costly value of it. It is the greatest demonstration of the love of God and this love could not have been displayed apart from the infinitely valuable price of the death of His perfect Son.

1 John 4:10 - 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that **He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins**. NASB

If there could have been *any* other way than the sacrifice of Jesus to save sinners, surely God would have answered Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane!

Mark 14:35-36 - 35 And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell to the ground, and *began* to pray **that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by**. 36 And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for Thee; **remove this cup from Me**; yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt." NASB

Of all of the reasons why it is absolutely necessary that Christ's Cross be the only means of propitiation for sinners, it is because God, in His infinite wisdom and omniscience, has set forth in the divine decree that it should be so. In other words, God has decreed that salvation be wrought by this means, and this makes it absolutely necessary because God does not deliberate in moments of time in His consideration of decrees, but rather in perfect omniscience decrees that which is perfect in one simple and *eternal* act.

1 Peter 1:20 - 20 For **He was foreknown before the foundation of the world**, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you NASB

Praise God, the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient to meet all of these demands of God's holiness, and the Cross does provide for us a righteousness before God.

Hebrews 9:13-14 - 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 **how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God**, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? NASB

The demands of divine justice have been satisfied by Christ, and sin has been put away.

Hebrews 9:26 - 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now **once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**. NASB

Let us therefore see and affirm that it was absolutely necessary for Jesus to die in our place, and for us, and this to be a propitiation for our sins. In light of this, let us consider the infinite value of His death, and may His blood be to us what it truly is, "*precious blood!*"

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The Nature of the Atonement

The atonement has several very important *characteristics* which are important to realize. In the hymn “For Man the Savior Bled,” the writer makes the statement, “*Oh what heavenly wonders dwell in Thy atoning blood!*” Now when we consider the nature of the atonement, this truth is displayed wonderfully. There is so much depth of character in what Christ has done, it sends one’s heart and mind soaring! Let us consider then some of these matters. As we think about the very ground of the atonement we must consider that it is ***grounded in God’s Sovereignty and Eternal Decree***. This is to say that God planned the atonement, and all of its intricate aspects to come to pass exactly as they did from before the creation of the world.

1 Peter 1:20 - 20 For **He was foreknown before the foundation of the world**, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you NASB

This, of course, is true about everything that happens, but nonetheless also true of the atonement. Therefore, it was always the intended purpose of God for Jesus the Christ to come and give His life as a ransom for sinners, to satisfy and appease His divine wrath, by His sacrifice to stand in the place of those sinners whom He has chosen to save, and by these to reconcile them to Himself. This is very clear in Scripture. This is why God “*sent*” Jesus, to fulfill the plan of redemption He had purposed from all eternity.

1 John 4:10 - 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that **He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins**. NASB

John 5:36 - 36 "But the witness which I have is greater than *that of* John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, **that the Father has sent Me**. NASB

God is seen in Scripture as the cause of the atonement, the great architect behind it all.

Isaiah 53:6 – 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But **the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him**. NASB

Romans 3:25 - 25 **whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith**. *This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;* NASB

Atonement for sin is therefore CERTAIN! The awesome and wonderful thing about this is that since God has intended to save from the beginning, then that is exactly what He will do and has done. This is expressed in the very name of Jesus, which means, “*the Lord saves!*” In other words, this makes the atonement sufficient to achieve its ends, since its ends are the thing for which it was designed by God. This is greatly reassuring! We can rest in the fact that God has intended to save us, so we will be saved! This is the very purpose that Jesus has come, to consummate the ages by His great work of redemption!

Hebrews 9:26 - 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now **once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**. NASB

But what was it that moved God to design such a thing as this? Well, the answer to this question sheds more light on the *character* of the atonement. ***The death of Christ upon the cross is motivated by free and sovereign love!*** This is to say that what moved or motivated God to design a world with fallen people and give the life of His Son in sacrifice for their sins, was the desire to display His love in an amazing and death defying way! What words could be used to describe the profound depth of the love of God! Only Jesus the Living Word could do that through all that He has done!

1 John 4:10 - 10 **In this is love**, not that we loved God, but **that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins**. NASB

John 3:16 - 16 "**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son**, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. NASB

Ephesians 5:2 - 2 and walk in love, just as **Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us**, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. NASB

God was not obligated to save us, but in fact purposed to save us *freely*. God did not owe mankind a debt, on the contrary, He is the one offended by the actions of people. Therefore, if He plans to save the offending rebels, He does it by His own sovereign and free prerogative! He does it because He is gracious and merciful! Therefore God's love is not constrained by anything except the perfect, free and sovereign pleasure of His will.

Ephesians 1:4-6 - 4 just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. **In love 5 He predestined us** to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, **which He freely bestowed on us** in the Beloved. NASB

This love is so profound that He Himself is willing to be the atoning victim and bear the very penalty which is reserved for those who induce His holy wrath. He *is* the sacrificial lamb which has to die, in my place, for my sin! What amazing love is this?

1 John 2:2 - 2 and **He Himself is the propitiation for our sins**; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world. NASB

As we have stated there is a host of biblical terms which describe the character of the atonement. This is to say that the Bible uses many different terms in different passages to describe what it is and what has been accomplished by it. Its very nature is that which is pictured in the Old Testament "*sacrifice.*" Therefore, Christ is our "*sacrifice,*" our Passover lamb that died "*vicariously*" (for us) and as a "*substitute*" (in our place). In speaking about this Old Testament sacrifice, John Murray states.... "*The sacrifice was the divinely instituted provision whereby the sin might be covered and the liability to divine wrath and curse removed. The Old Testament worshipper when he brought his oblation to the altar substituted an animal victim in his place. In laying his hands upon the head of the offering there was transferred symbolically to the offering the sin and liability of the offerer. This is the pivot on which the transaction turned. The notion in essence was that the sin of the offerer was imputed to the offering and the offering bore as a result the death penalty.*" Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Passover, and the very sacrificial Lamb portrayed by it. He is the reality to which the Passover pointed, the ultimate sacrifice to cover our sin, so that the death angel of God's wrath could pass us by and we could be set free from the bondage of sin (Egypt-Slavery-Pharaoh).

1 Corinthians 5:7 -7 Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just **as you are in fact** unleavened. **For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.** NASB

Not only this but Jesus death has an eternal and perfect efficacy that the Old Testament sacrifices of goats and bulls could never afford. This is because Jesus Himself entered heaven and the true tabernacle of God to offer His blood there in the presence of God.

Hebrews 9:11-12 - 11 But when Christ appeared *as* a high priest of the good things to come, **He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle**, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and **not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood**, He entered the holy place once for all, **having obtained eternal redemption.** NASB

He obtained an eternal redemption. His death was "*one sacrifice for sins for all time,*" that is, it was final, complete and sufficient to atone.

Hebrews 10:11-13 - 11 And every priest stands **daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins**; 12 but He, having offered **one sacrifice for sins for all time**, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, 13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. NASB

Because God has instituted the sacrificial system as a means of atonement, he has therefore been pleased to have a sacrifice appease or satisfy His wrath. This we call "*propitiation.*" *Propitiation is an "appeasement" or "satisfaction."* The holy anger and wrath of God toward sin demands a satisfaction of justice, and His vengeance is enraged toward sin and must have a subject to inflict the good and righteous penalty of death.

Romans 6:23 - 23 **For the wages of sin is death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. NASB

Therefore we must have a substitute to satisfy God's wrath or be consumed ourselves. This is what sets Christianity apart from every other world religion. Jesus Christ is the only sufficient substitute who can meet the just requirements of God's law in order to die vicariously (for us) as a substitute (in our place). Jesus becomes then this propitiation *Himself* to appease the wrath of God.

Hebrews 2:17 - 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, **to make propitiation for the sins of the people.** NASB

Therefore, the atonement does in fact "appease" or "satisfy" God's holy wrath toward sin. ***Because this is true, the atonement is also "expiatory." This is to say that it removes our guilt by meeting the demands of holy justice, fully.*** The offense of our sins has been absorbed by the *sacrifice* of the body of Jesus for us, and the requirements of God's justice for sin have been "cancelled out."

Colossians 2:13-14 - 13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 **having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us** and which was hostile to us; and **He has taken it out of the way,** having nailed it to the cross. NASB

The penalty deserved in our guilt, has been paid in full by the sacrifice of Christ. ***This is to say then that the atonement is "redemptive," that it pays the price required by justice.*** Jesus death on the cross is seen as a ransom price paid to redeem us from the penal sanctions of the law.

1 Timothy 2:5-7 - 5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 **who gave Himself as a ransom for all,** the testimony borne at the proper time. NASB

Jesus death is the full payment price demanded by the law because of our violations of it. He redeemed us from the *curse* of the law.

Galatians 3:13 - 13 **Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law,** having become a curse for us — for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE" NASB

It is important to recognize that this redeeming from the law is in relation to the violations we committed against the law in our sin. However, there is expressed in the law the very character and nature of God to which we look and eagerly desire to possess. We are not redeemed from this eager desire and love for God's holy law, but only the penal sanctions it imposes upon us because of our failure to meet its holy requirements. So we honor and love the law in all of its goodness, and the holy price it imposes upon our failures to obey it, have been fully paid by the redemption of Jesus the Christ.

Ephesians 1:7 - 7 **In Him we have redemption through His blood,** the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, NASB

Revelation 5:9 - 9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for **Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men** from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. NASB

To this end therefore, the redemption that is in Christ has redeemed us from the very *power* of sin, that we might live a new life, free from the penalties of divine justice and eager to do what is good.

Titus 2:14 - 14 who **gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself** a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. NASB

Through Christ's redemption, the consequences of the devil's temptations to sin have been fully paid, and he can no longer accuse and threaten us with the holy demands of the law because we have been set free from these to now honor and serve God, not by the motivation of fear, but of thanksgiving and devoted love! In this redemption, Christ destroyed the devil's work!

Hebrews 2:14-15 - 14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might **render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those** who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. NASB

1 John 3:8 - 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. **The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil.** NASB

The Sufficiency of the Atonement

This work then, opens the door for our relationship with God to be restored! Because of this wonderful redemption paid by Christ, God is no longer alienated from us. ***This is to say that the atonement brings about “reconciliation” between us and God.*** By taking away sin, God has removed the ground of alienation between us and Him, and thereby restored our relationship to Him. This work was initiated by God who reconciled us to Himself (2 Cor 5:18).

Romans 5:8-11 - 8 But **God demonstrates His own love toward us**, in that while we were yet sinners, **Christ died for us**. 9 Much more then, having now been **justified by His blood**, we shall be **saved from the wrath of God** through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies, **we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son**, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only this, but **we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation**. NASB

We see then, that all these things that have been accomplished by God through Christ in the atonement, have reconciled God to us and us to God, and our relationship has been restored.

Colossians 1:21-22 - 22 But now **he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight**, without blemish and free from accusation- NASB

Through Jesus' redemptive death upon the Cross, we have been *fully* reconciled to God. This is because Jesus *fully* met the demands of God's righteousness in the Law for our sins, having paid the penalty the Law demanded for sins, but also having earned a positive righteousness before God by His perfect obedience to the perceptive requirements of the Law. John Murray comments on this.... *“Christ as the vicar of His people came under the curse and condemnation due to sin and He also fulfilled the law of God in all its positive requirements. In other words, He took care of the guilt of sin and perfectly fulfilled the demands of righteousness. He perfectly met both the penal and the perceptive requirements of God's law.”* Therefore the demands of the Law have been fully met in Christ, and this is the ground of our reconciliation to God. ***In legal terms, the Bible describes us having been justified before God.*** Justification is the act of God declaring us righteous now based on the merits of Christ through faith in Him. This means that we have a *foreign* righteousness that is *“not our own,”* but is ours by faith in Christ.

Philippians 3:9-10 - 9 and may be found in Him, **not having a righteousness of my own** derived from the Law, but that **which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith**, NASB

Romans 3:21-24 - 21 But now apart from the Law **the righteousness of God** has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe**; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a **gift by His grace** through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; NASB

This is good news. This life and death of Christ is so complete before God that it not only meets the legal demands of God's Law, but ***even cleanses and washes away the defilement of our sins so as to purify us before God's spotless holiness so that we are fully sanctified.***

Hebrews 10:14 - 14 For **by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified**. NASB

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 - 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, **who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption**, 31 that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." NASB

This ***“justification”*** and ***“sanctification”*** before God is so complete that it has removed any and all condemnation of God from us so that we are set free the tyranny of the Law's demands, which a sinner can never meet.

Romans 8:1-2 - 8:1 There is **therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. NASB

Jesus then, is the consummation of God's Law for us, and we now rest in freedom from its demands. We now have perfect freedom to obey the Law because, if and when we fail, Christ is our righteousness, and we can be resolved once again to obey it, without having the penalty of death inflicted upon us. Every moment is new for the Christian!

Romans 10:4 - 4 For **Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes**. NASB

We must conclude then from these things that Jesus life and death are sufficient to redeem us from sin and reconcile us to God. And that this reconciliation is final, complete and eternal, so that nothing more is required to be justified or sanctified before God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - 8 For **by grace you have been saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; 9 **not as a result of works, that no one should boast.** NASB

Romans 3:27-28 - 27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28 For **we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.** NASB

It is therefore imperative to recognize the many false distortions of the Gospel which call people to some further obedience required than that of simple faith in Christ. It is Christ in whom we have believed, and He Himself is our righteousness before God, and we have received Him by simple faith.

John 6:28-29 - 28 They said therefore to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "**This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.**" NASB

There are no works that we can perform that somehow merit Christ for us, rather if we look beyond Christ to find merit before God, we forfeit Christ and this is the *ultimate* offense to God.

Galatians 5:1-4 - It was **for freedom that Christ set us free**; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, **Christ will be of no benefit to you.** 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 **You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law**; you have fallen from grace. NASB

This was the tragic mistake of Israel which ultimately brought the judgment of God upon them.

Romans 9:31-10:4 - 31 but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. 32 Why? **Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.** They stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 just as it is written, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. 3 For **not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own**, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. 4 **For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.** NASB

We do not seek to be justified before God by the works of the Law, but rather because we have been justified by Christ, we now live by faith in Him, continually looking to His life and death on the Cross as our righteousness before God.

Galatians 2:20-21 - 20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and **the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God**, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. 21 "I do not nullify the grace of God; **for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.**" NASB

John 3:14-15 - 14 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must **the Son of Man be lifted up**; 15 **that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.** NASB

The Law then is a display of what Christ's life looks like in practice, so that we learn how to walk in His Spirit and fulfill the righteousness of the Law toward God and other people.

Obedience to Law is something we greatly desire, as a result of being justified by God through Christ, because we are motivated by gratitude for what he has done and a desire to honor Him with our life. But it is not, and never will be the grounds of our justification and sanctification before God. We have become recipients of the love and mercy of God *in spite* of our life of sin and disobedience.

Titus 3:4-7 - 4 But when **the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy,** by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that **being justified by His grace** we might be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life. NASB

We have been released from our sins by the blood of Jesus the Christ, because of His love.

Revelation 1:5 - 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. **To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood,** NASB

The Results and Benefits of the Atonement

The Atonement is the ground of God's blessing upon us and the very fountain from which flows all of the riches of His grace toward us. *Here we are saying that the atonement is the wellspring of all benefit and blessing of God toward mankind.* It is because of Christ's atoning work that God can even look upon the world and mankind, with all of its sin and rebellion against Him, and sustain their life until such time as He puts everything in its proper place and order.

Romans 2:4-6 – 4 Or do you think lightly of **the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience**, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart **you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God**, 7 who WILL RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: NASB

The atonement is the ground of *common* grace. Common grace is that grace or favor that God dispenses to unbelieving sinners who do not come to faith in Christ and be saved. In this common grace, God bears patiently with sin until such time that He brings it to justice at the final judgment. In other words, God did not immediately bring judgment upon man when Adam and Eve sinned by destroying them, but instead patiently waited through the ages as He brought about His eternal purpose in Christ. Even now, He is still fulfilling His plan of redemption and bearing patiently with sin and sinners until such time that His purposes are completed. At that time He will bring sin to its final justice and it will be eradicated from His Kingdom and His people forever. Therefore because God is fulfilling His eternal purpose in Christ through the Atonement, He not only patiently bears with sin and sinners, but showers innumerable blessings upon them which they have neither deserved nor are they thankful for them.

Romans 1:20-21 - 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For **even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks**; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. NASB

God gives even to the wicked and unbelieving all that they need to sustain their lives, giving them food and shelter, sunshine and rain, even their very life and breath.

Matthew 5:44-45 - 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you 45 in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; **for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.** NASB

Not only this but God gives them knowledge of Himself (Rom 1:21), help in restraining evil through conscience (Rom 2:15), and government (Rom 13:6), and also warnings against sin and all of its destruction and death (Rom 6:23). In fact, because God is providentially governing the history of the world, every blessing that the unbeliever receives in this life comes ultimately from an unmerited favor that God gives including life and breath and existence.

Acts 17:24-28 - 24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, **since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things**; 26 and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 **for in Him we live and move and exist**, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.' NASB

In contrast to common grace, the believer in Christ receives *eternal* blessing from God which is infinite and inexhaustible. In Christ, believers are showered with all of the blessings of God, and He now views them *only* with favor. In this He has made countless promises for provision and care, love and blessing.

2 Corinthians 1:20 - 20 **For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes**; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. NASB

The **Scripture plainly declares** that God will **"cause all things to work together,"** including every single thing whether good or bad, **"for good"** to those who love Him.

Romans 8:28 - 28 And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God**, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. NASB

In fact, God will in Christ, spend the endless ages showing believers the “*surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward*” them.

Ephesians 2:7 - 7 in order that **in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.** NASB

This is because we have been fully reconciled to God in Christ and now rest in His favor and presence to bless. In this favor God is said to “*freely give us all things!*”

Romans 8:32 - 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, **how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?** NASB

The sufficiency of this blessing of God toward believers is complete so that He promises to meet all of our needs in this life.

Philippians 4:19-20 - 19 And **my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.** 20 Now to our God and Father *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen. NASB

2 Peter 1:2-3 - 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that **His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness,** through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. NASB

2 Corinthians 9:8 - 8 And God is able to make **all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance** for every good deed; NASB

The believer is rich in every way! We, having been made heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, possess all things so that we could not be richer! We have become very children of God!

2 Corinthians 8:9 - 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, **that you through His poverty might become rich.** NASB

Romans 8:16-17 - 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit **that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,** if indeed we suffer with *Him* in order that we may also be glorified with *Him*. NASB

1 Corinthians 3:21-23 - 21 So then let no one boast in men. **For all things belong to you,** 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; **all things belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ;** and Christ belongs to God. NASB

This blessing and favor of God is so exceedingly great that Paul prays that God would open the eyes of the believer to see and understand just how marvelous it is!

Ephesians 1:18-19 - 18 *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is **the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.** *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might NASB

Not only temporal benefits come to us through Christ, but also all of the *heavenly* benefits of God’s character and virtue are ours through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 - 22 But the **fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control;** against such things there is no law. NASB

Of course in all of these blessings of God the greatest is that of God Himself. We now have, because of the Atonement, received God Himself as our “*exceeding great reward,*” and have fellowship with the Father and the Son.

1 John 1:3 - 3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that **you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.** NASB

This means that we have come into an intimate knowledge of Christ Himself, so that we can experience all of the blessing of His power and presence through our relation to Him.

Colossians 2:2-3 - that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, **and attaining to all the wealth** that comes from the full assurance of understanding, **resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.** NASB

The number of passages in the Bible describing the benefits of coming to know God, are simply staggering. Let us offer to God a heart of thanksgiving and a mouth filled with praise for all of the good things He has done for us in Christ! Let us rejoice in all of His goodness toward us and acknowledge His amazing love with lives that honor and worship Him!