

Yet none of the great men who then sounded the depths of human knowledge, arrived at any certain belief of the divine mercy. Socrates, it is well known, expressed a doubt whether it is *possible* for God to pardon sin. How, then, can it be thought that man is competent to originate the idea of human salvation, when he has no means of determining, from mere reason, whether God is merciful,—a truth which lies at the very foundation of redemption for the fallen? Nor is this all. Even though the attributes of divine mercy were discovered as belonging to God, how shall it be known, except by his express word, if he shall exercise it to guilty man? He might be merciful, and yet sufficient reasons might appear to His infinite wisdom, why His mercy should not be extended to our race. We know an earthly sovereign may be generous and disposed to forgive, and yet considerations arising from the honour of his character, or the safety of his kingdom, may forbid him to exercise his clemency to all the people in a rebellious province. And who could have told if it would be consistent with the glory of God's throne, to show mercy to fallen man? If we may advert here, to a fact of Bible revelation in illustration, we learn that fallen angels, though needing Divine mercy as much as we, have not been visited with any redeeming grace. What human being, then, could declare whether God should extend to our guilty race his saving mercy! Might it not have been feared, since he had passed by the higher race of angels, he would not deign to regard, with his compassion, the lowly family of man?

Nay, still further, even though sure that God is merciful, and disposed to show favour to our guilty world, where is the man capable of devising a plan of salvation for the human race? What difficulties are encountered here, to adjust all interests in the great emergency? There is man, fallen, guilty, depraved in heart, estranged from God in condition, an heir of woe. How shall this sinful, miserable being be raised to the favour and fellowship of the Holy One? What obstacles are seen here for power to remove; what difficulties for wisdom to surmount; what wretchedness for goodness to relieve? In a plan of salvation, which shall fully meet the exigencies of this case, must not we recognise the sure impress of the infinite mind? To strengthen the proof of this, look too at the difficulties in the way of human redemption, arising from the character and law of God. By the sin of man, God is greatly displeased, and yet he pities the perishing, how then shall his anger be consistently turned away, and his compassion find an honourable channel to the fallen? The divine law cannot change, or remit its penalty to the transgressors without an adequate atonement be found? Nay, sin makes man afraid of his Judge, and averse to communion with Him, how shall the terrors of guilt in the human breast be changed for a once fervent, but now lost love?

These were some of the great questions to be solved in the scheme of mercy for men. Is not the utter inadequacy of the human mind to grapple with such problems demonstrated by the history of all false religions? What do we find in all these but a consciousness in man of sin, and a total failure of finding the way back to God. Many paths are pursued, but the human conscience is satisfied with none of them, in leading upward and homeward to God. At one time God's law is brought down to the level of man's necessities, and he attempts to walk in safety over its inept penalty. At another time God's goodness is exalted, to hold out to man a free pardon, and while mercy in the one balance ascends, justice in the other sinks to the earth, to be over-trampled and soiled. In these human devices, if atonement is thought of at all, it is to be specially observed that satisfaction is always proposed by the offering of a *lower* for a *higher* nature. While it is a dictate of enlightened reason that it is not *possible* for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin, this is yet the highest reach of man's unaided mind, in its thoughts of sacrifice for its transgression. Further than this, man cannot of himself go, unless, indeed, we regard as an exception the proposal, shocking even to his own moral nature, that he should give the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul.