

# ATONEMENT

## KEY QUESTIONS:

- What is atonement?
- Why is it important to Christians?
- How is atonement linked to the Law and salvation?



## INTRODUCTION

In this session, we will investigate the concept of atonement, then answer the key questions, before moving on to tackle an exam style question.

In the dictionary atonement is defined as, *'to take make amends for a wrong or injury'*.

Translation: *When someone does something wrong, they do something to put things right.*

## CONSIDER

1. Have you ever upset someone? Maybe your mum or a friend? (We all do, nobody's perfect – no, not even you!) What did you do to make it up to them? Now that's what I'm talking about. That, right there, is **atonement**.
2. What has atonement got to do with Christianity? Short answer: everything!  
For the long answer, check out the following:

**ATONEMENT** is really important to Christians. When God created the world, He designed a set of teachings for Christians to live by. These are called the Law. Just like a school needs rules to function properly, the Law was created to guide humans on how to behave. The most famous of these is the Ten Commandments. When people break these Laws, they are committing a sin. God hates sin, so people who commit them can expect consequences. This can be punishment on earth, for example, going to prison for stealing. But it can also be separation from God forever.

In the Old Testament times, before Jesus was born, people used to make a sacrifice to try and make amends to God for their sins. The sacrifice depended on how rich they were. The High Priest offered these to God in an attempt to achieve reconciliation with Him, to get close to him again.

But they couldn't achieve atonement on their own, so God sorted the problem out by sending Jesus.

**IMPORTANT BIT:** Christians believe that Jesus' death on the cross was a sacrifice for all the sins humans have committed. His death provided the atonement, making amends for all our sins. We don't need to do anything to make it up to God - Jesus' death did it all.

A bit like when you do something wrong and try to make amends to put things right, Jesus' death is the 'making amends to God' part for us. His death puts things right for us with God once and for all so that we can enjoy reconciliation with Him.

Jesus' atonement for our sins means we can become close to God again. This saves us from living apart from God. The word for this is salvation. Because of the atonement of Jesus' death, we can have salvation: remain close, and in relationship with God. Forever.

To read a bit more about atonement, see <http://request.org.uk/life/the-atonement>

### TASK

Complete these questions before moving on:

- What is the Law?
- What is sin?
- What is atonement?
- What is reconciliation?
- What is salvation?

3. Your exam board will want you to show you understand what atonement is and why it's important – which we've covered so far. But you may need to refer to key Christian teachings about atonement from sources of wisdom and authority. We're going to be digging into the Bible for these. So here goes; buckle up...

## OLD TESTAMENT TEACHINGS

(the first part of the Bible, written before Jesus was born)

### THE SCAPEGOAT

<sup>20</sup> When Aaron has finished performing the ritual to purify the Most Holy Place, the rest of the Tent of the Lord's presence, and the altar, he shall present to the Lord the live goat chosen for Azazel. <sup>21</sup> He shall put both of his hands on the goat's head and confess over it all the evils, sins, and rebellions of the people of Israel, and so transfer them to the goat's head. Then the goat is to be driven off into the desert by someone appointed to do it. <sup>22</sup> The goat will carry all their sins away with him into some uninhabited land.

*Leviticus 26:20-22*

### ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- a. What is a 'scapegoat'?
- b. How does this Bible extract link to atonement?
- c. How does it link to Jesus' death on the cross?

**FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH**

<sup>3</sup> We despised him and rejected him;  
he endured suffering and pain.  
No one would even look at him—  
we ignored him as if he were nothing.

<sup>4</sup> “But he endured the suffering that should have been ours,  
the pain that we should have borne.  
All the while we thought that his suffering  
was punishment sent by God.

<sup>5</sup> But because of our sins he was wounded,  
beaten because of the evil we did.  
We are healed by the punishment he suffered,  
made whole by the blows he received.

<sup>6</sup> All of us were like sheep that were lost,  
each of us going his own way.  
But the Lord made the punishment fall on him,  
the punishment all of us deserved.

<sup>7</sup> “He was treated harshly, but endured it humbly;  
he never said a word.  
Like a lamb about to be slaughtered,  
like a sheep about to be sheared,  
he never said a word.

<sup>8</sup> He was arrested and sentenced and led off to die,  
and no one cared about his fate.  
He was put to death for the sins of our people.

<sup>9</sup> He was placed in a grave with those who are evil,  
he was buried with the rich,  
even though he had never committed a crime  
or ever told a lie.”

*Isaiah 53:3-9*

The prophet Isaiah spoke of a new king that would come. We know that this was Jesus, who was born many years after the above extract was written.

- d. Read the Bible passage found at <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+27%3A+11-54&version=NLT> to find out more about Jesus' death. How does the prophecy from Isaiah link to Jesus' death on the cross? Is it accurate? How?



## NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS

(the second part of the Bible, starting from when Jesus was born)

The lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

*John 1:19*

We were God's enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son.

*Romans 5:10*

Christ died for our sins.

*1 Corinthians 15:3*

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

*Mark 10:45*

### THE LORD'S SUPPER - THE NIGHT BEFORE JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED

<sup>26</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. "Take and eat it," he said; "this is my body." <sup>27</sup> Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and gave it to them. "Drink it, all of you," he said; <sup>28</sup> "this is my blood, which seals God's covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> I tell you, I will never again drink this wine until the day I drink the new wine with you in my Father's Kingdom."

*Matthew 26:26-29*

- e. Why do you think Jesus was referred to as 'the lamb of God' in the verse from John?
- f. Mark 4 say Jesus gave 'his life as a ransom for many.' What does this mean? How does it link to atonement?
- g. The Lord's Supper: what does Jesus say His blood will do?
- h. How does the blood of Christ, which He talks about during The Lord's Supper, connect to atonement?
- i. Read Romans 5:10. Explain how this verse links to:
  - the Law
  - sin
  - atonement
  - reconciliation
  - salvation
- j. Which of all these teachings from the Bible (Old and New Testament) do you think explains atonement the best? Choose two and explain your reasons for choosing them.
- k. How are the Law, salvation and atonement linked?

#### 4. Exam Question Time...

There are several GCSE and Scottish National Certificate exam boards across the UK. You should attempt the question which relates to your exam board as each of them has their own terminology and guidance on how to answer. If you aren't sure which is your exam board, contact your teacher to ask.

**WJEC EDUQAS**

Explain why Christians believe atonement is important. (8 marks)

**PEARSON EDEXCEL**

Explain two Christian teachings about atonement. (5 marks)  
In your answer you must refer to a source of wisdom or authority.

**AQA**

Explain two Christian teachings about atonement. (5 marks)  
Refer to sacred writings or another source of Christian belief and teaching in your answer.

**OCR**

Outline why atonement is important to Christians. (6 marks)

**SQA - N5**

- a) What do Christians believe about atonement? (4 marks)
- b) How might belief about atonement affect the life of Christians? (4 marks)