

What is Atonement: Substitution

Jesus' crucifixion and death was in atonement for the sins of mankind. Atonement, what Jesus did to reconcile human beings with God has many aspects to it, and this lesson introduces you to one facet of the extent and depth of His work on the cross.

1. In the Old Testament, God introduces how the penalty of sin can be repaid through the sacrifice of the life of a substitute. The sacrifice of an unblemished animal takes the place of the sinner, and its blood makes atonement.

“Then he shall **kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people** and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. (Lev 16:15-16, ESV)

Observe how the New Testament portrays Jesus Christ. What do you observe? From God's perspective, what was Jesus sacrificed for?

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29, ESV)

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. (1 Pet 2:21-22, ESV)

2. From a human being's perspective, what was Jesus Christ sacrificed for?

The apostles Matthew and Mark write:

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matt 20:26-28; Mark 10:43-45 ESV)

Jesus Himself is recorded saying:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:51, ESV)

The apostle Paul writes:

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Tim 2:5-6, ESV)

3. How does this substitution reflect on God's love and justice?

What is Atonement: Substitution Teacher Notes

Jesus' crucifixion and death was in atonement for the sins of mankind. Atonement, what Jesus did to reconcile human beings with God has many aspects to it, and this lesson introduces you to one facet of the extent and depth of His work on the cross.

In this lesson, the student is introduced to perspective. Throughout the Bible, there are two perspectives: one from God and the other from man. It is important to recognize that God's word isn't just about you; it is a record of God's interaction with human beings. The most important perspective to understand is God's.

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Encourage the student to make as many observations he can of both Old and New Testament texts.

The New Testament authors certainly understood the crucifixion of Christ within the context of the Old Testament sacrificial system. The sacrifice of an unblemished animal takes the place of the sinner, and its blood makes atonement for sin and transgression.

For Christ to be the unblemished animal, He had to be sinless, and both apostles Peter and Paul indicate that (2 Cor 5:21 and 1 Pet 2:22-24; 3:18).

John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” (John 1:29). While the Day of Atonement used a male goat, the lamb was a reference to the Passover lamb to signify God's judgment passing over those who believe in Jesus Christ.

From God's perspective, Jesus Christ died for the sins of mankind and satisfied His Father's prescribed requirement.

2. From a human being's perspective, what was Jesus Christ sacrificed for?

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As in the first question, encourage the student to make as many observations of the above verses as he can. Ask the student: do you know what ransom means?

A ransom is a demand for money or some payment for the release of a prisoner.

From a human perspective, Jesus Christ represented and died for human beings. Instead of human beings facing the consequences of their sins, Jesus Christ died as a substitute for human beings who were prisoners of sin. Jesus Christ paid the penalty, the ransom, for the sins of mankind so that Believers may have eternal life.

3. How does this substitution reflect on God’s love and justice?

Encourage the student to grapple with this question and discuss what it means. Ask probing questions to help him understand the significance of substitution.

From God’s perspective, Jesus Christ’s substitution was a penal sacrifice and paid God’s judicial price in full. Jesus Christ stood in the place of human beings, represented us and bore the total penalty of our sins.

From a human perspective, Jesus Christ’s substitution conferred His Father’s acceptance upon us. Jesus Christ’s atonement brought us into God’s favor and reconciled our relationship with Him. God’s provision of His Son Jesus Christ, for the purpose of atoning for the sins of mankind, was personally for each and every individual Believer and a supreme demonstration of God’s love. Jesus exchanged His life for each one Believer.