

The Atonement - Adult SS - Lesson 1: The Need for Atonement

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[0:00] Here we go. So Leviticus 6, if anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the Lord, the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord and he shall be forgiven.

So the word atonement, it's a biblical word, so that's why we're using this term. But second of all, atonement is a helpful word to use because it tells us what the cross is all about.

At, what's going on on the cross? Because the word atonement means at-one-ment, right? So that's how you can remember it. It means at-one-ment. It means making at one.

So you can just break it up if you want to remember that. The cross, the atonement, is all about making sinners one with God. And so the atonement, what we're going to be thinking about this term, this is at the very heart of the gospel.

This is, you can have this in your mind, this is the absolute essential core of our faith. So look what the Apostle Paul says about the atonement, about the cross, 1 Corinthians 2.

[1:12] So do you see what Paul is saying here? Christ crucified, the atonement, that is the essential thing that Paul preached.

The atonement, all that we're thinking about this series, this is the irreducible heart of the gospel message. Now, we also need to realise the gospel includes more than the atonement, but it's never less than the atonement.

What we're thinking about, this is the heart of the gospel. And so this term, my intention is for us to really dive in and think about, deeply, about the cross, about what Christ was doing on there.

And so my intention for us is just to get a better appreciation and love for the atonement. And so I want us to have a deeper understanding of the cross.

I want us to think about things like, why do we need the atonement? Why the cross? What exactly was Jesus doing on the cross? What was he experiencing on that day?

[2:26] Who was he dying for? And if Jesus was forsaken by God, as he says on the cross, how does all that relate to the Trinity? So all these things I want us to get into, we're going to be starting a little bit shallower today, and then we're going to slowly get deeper and deeper.

And so some of this, particularly some of the early things, might be familiar to you. If so, if these things are familiar, I hope we can just get a clearer and deeper understanding of things you're familiar with.

But hopefully, as we kind of get deeper into the waters, there'll be new things that we'll discover.

And so just get a better appreciation of the cross. But today, I want us to start slightly in the shallow end as we wade into this pool.

I want us to see why we need the atonement. Why the cross? Why the cross and death and blood? Why all of this is necessary? Why do we need the atonement? But to see that, we need to realise, first of all, there is a problem.

[3:32] Because if the atonement means being at one with God, remember, at one-ment, then that presumes a problem.

It presumes something is broken, doesn't it? It presupposes there is not at one-ment in this world.

The atonement says something about us and humanity and the world.

It says there is a deep need of being at one. And that is because in our sin, there is something broken.

We have broken everything. And this is the first point I want us to see today. You can follow along on your handout. We have broken everything. So as we set out to understand the atonement and what it means, what it involves, all that was happening on the cross, a helpful starting point is to see the need for the atonement.

And to do that, we need to go back to the beginning. We need to see how God intended this world and humanity to be. So let's think about creation.

[4:42] So what happened in the beginning? In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning, God created the world.

That's all creation. I'll call it the world. So God created the heavens and the earth, everything. And he made humanity a part of that creation.

He made humanity a part of that creation. But not merely just a part of it.

So when God created humanity, we aren't just like he created rocks. And just like rocks, he created humans. Or just like he created ants or tigers.

He also created humans. No, God has made us above all that. God has made us with a special responsibility toward him.

[5:45] And what is that responsibility? So God created us, but he created us special and with a responsibility toward him.

And what is that responsibility? Genesis 1. Let us make man in our image after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth.

And over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So do you see, we are not just mere animals. We've been given the responsibility and privilege to image God.

That is a part of who we are. We are to reflect what he is like. That's what an image is. An image reflects what he is like. We are to reflect God's righteousness and holiness and his rule here on earth.

And so we are moral creatures. We are accountable to God. And so we are not here neutrally here on earth.

[6:50] We are not here kind of left up to our own devices, our own direction, our own standards. No, we're accountable to God. And so we are creatures who must obey God.

And so God has given us a law to obey. If we are to obey God, what do we obey? We obey a law. We are to listen to all that he says and love God and depend on him and glorify him all by obeying him.

And for Adam or for us, the law that looks like the Ten Commandments. That is the sum of God's law. And that would have been the case for Adam as well. But Adam kind of had a central command that kind of took all those Ten Commandments and focused it on one commandment. It took the form of a specific command, Genesis 2. And the Lord God commanded the man saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat.

For in that day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. So Adam had a law that he was to obey. And this is a part of the design of humanity.

[8:07] We are made to obey God. And it's in this state of obedience.

It's in this state that God is pleased with us. He's happy with his creation when he sees this. That's why when he makes humanity on the sixth day, what does he say at the end of that day?

It is very good. He sees this unstained, obedient humanity and he says, this is very good. He's pleased with it.

And so we are made to be in a good, peaceful, right relationship with God. We're not meant to be neutral in God's eyes.

God is not meant to be indifferent to us. No, we're made to be right with God. And not only that, we are made to be with God.

[9:20] Because what did God do with humanity in the garden? Genesis 3. God walked in the garden with Adam and Eve.

This is a part of how humanity is designed. We are designed to be with God, actually with God. For him to live with us and for us to know him and love him and have communion with him.

And enjoy this peaceful, right relationship with him. So not only do we have responsibility toward God, but God has designed as well for him to be with us.

We are made to be with God. To have this close communion with him.

And so what is this dynamic between God and man meant to be like? Well, there's meant to be peace with God.

[10:30] Peace between us and a peace-filled world. There's meant to be joy in this dynamic. God is meant to be our delight.

And God is meant to be pleased with this world. And there's meant to be life. So God is the source of life. And we're meant to be with him and enjoy that life and be nourished by him.

And this whole world is meant to be filled with life. And there's meant to be communion with God.

This means knowing God and loving him and having him in our lives as our God.

All this is to say is that we are meant to be at one with God. We are meant to be at one.

So man is meant to be at one with God. God is meant to be at one with man. And there's meant to be one whole at one world. But this isn't the way the world stayed.

[11:50] In sin, what should be one became broken in every possible way. And what did God say was the consequence of disobedience?

Genesis 2. For in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. But because we have sinned and we've broken God's law.

And sin is lawlessness. Sin is breaking God's law. Because of all that, our status has now changed before God. So we're made to be right with God.

We're meant to have peace with him and have this at one relationship. But now we are guilty before God. And therefore, because we're guilty, we now owe something to God.

There's a payment needing to be made to God. And that payment, what is it? It's our lives. You shall surely die.

[12:58] You could say, because we didn't obey God, and we don't in our sin. Because we didn't obey God, we are now guilty before God.

And so there is now a debt placed above our heads. There's now a debt placed above our heads. Humanity is now in a guilty sin debt to God. God, in his justice and righteousness, demands something from us in our guilt.

And we owe him something. What is it? Our lives. And that's how being guilty works. So think about just breaking the law in our country, right?

When we break the law in this country, we become guilty, don't we? And justice demands something from us. We have to pay something in some way.

[14:17] So if you use your phone while driving, you become guilty of that. And then you owe something. You have to pay £200, and you get six points on your license.

Okay? When you're guilty, you become in debt £200. Or if you commit murder, the price you pay for that, it's 30 years in prison or more.

So when you become guilty of murder, you become in debt, 30 years of your life in debt. That's what you have to pay. Well, if you break God's law, if you sin, you must pay with your life.

Humanity has become in debt with our lives, our souls, our blood. And this is how scripture speaks. So have a look at Ezekiel 18. The soul who sins shall die.

There's a justice kind of embedded into this world where the soul who sins must die.

[15:22] That is the payment. And look how Jesus teaches us to pray in Matthew 6. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Jesus speaks of sin as a debt. When we sin, we owe something. And Colossians 2 speaks of that as well. It speaks of the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

There is a debt over sinful humanity. But it's not just our physical lives, a few years here on earth that we have to give up. No. This death means eternal death.

And this is what the whole teaching of hell is all about. The price you pay for sinning against an infinitely holy and righteous God.

That price, it's an infinite death. Infinite suffering. That is what must be owed. And so this debt that hangs over a sinful humanity, this is huge.

[16:28] This debt hanging over us is the debt of hell. And humanity is trapped under this debt.

It follows us everywhere. We can't escape it. So it's like if you commit a crime, you're trapped under that debt, aren't you? If you commit murder, even if you run away, that debt still hangs over you. And so justice and the police and the courts, they won't let that go. That debt is constantly over you. And so that is the same with us.

We are now trapped in sin and guilt and debt. And we can't escape. And so not only that, our status has changed before God.

This isn't the way God designed it to be. Our status wasn't intended to be like this. But now our status has changed. We are now in debt before God.

[17:40] And so also God's view toward us has changed. And I want you to see how. I want you to break into groups.

Look at the little breakout section in that box. And just look at these verses and answer the following questions. It should be fairly simple. And you'll probably get it after two verses. But just look at them all.

Get an appreciation of what scripture has to say. Go. I'll give you a couple of minutes for that.

Thank you. You're a lot of interest. in any interest. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[20:06] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Okay, let's bring it together. I'm going to pick on some people. Ben, you look like you're having a good discussion.

How does God feel about guilty humanity and sin? What were some of the conclusions? He says he is indignant and angry. Indignant. What does it mean, Paul?

Yeah. When you're angry with the people, you're justified in anger. Okay. God is justified in his anger because we've sinned against him, so he's righteously angry.

Yeah, exactly. God is now angry with us, with a guilty humanity. And do you notice, have a look at John 3, verse 6.

[21:08] Who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. So the word remains, it implies that this is now the default. Okay.

By nature, we are children of God's wrath. Wrath means anger, right? His wrath is now set against humanity and sin.

So we were made to be right with God. Peace, friendship, unity. But now, we are not right with God. And so, I'll keep that for now.

We're not right with God. And so, God is angry with this world. We don't have the peace and life and joy and communion with God.

But there is now, on God's part, toward us, wrath. God is angry with this world.

[22:18] He has a disposition of wrath, anger toward guilty sinners. And so, do you see in Numbers 14? This is describing who God is, his nature.

And it says, he does not let the guilty just go scot-free. He can't. He's too just, too righteous.

And so, this anger, this wrath, this is a righteous anger toward the guilty. This isn't God just losing control and just flying off the handle and being angry.

No. This is a righteous anger from a judge who has perfect justice in him. And this is a righteous anger against sinners who have broken a holy law against an infinitely holy God.

And we've spat in God's face. And so, he is, he's wrathful. And so, just at this point, I want us to just to never forget how severe our sin is.

[23:35] And so, what has happened to the relationship between God and man? I hope you can tell just by these verses. We have been separated from God.

We can't be in his presence. What happened in the Garden of Eden? We were cast out of the Garden. And it was blocked off with an angel with a flaming sword.

Shut off. If you wanted to try and get back in, you can only die, right? A sword is there. We can't have communion with him or know him or enjoy him.

In sin, we are now enemies with God. And so, there is a debt on us. There is anger on God's part wrath.

And so, the relationship between us is broken. It's fractured.

[24:37] We are no longer at one with God. And this broken relationship, it means we have broken everything.

So, we now live in a cursed world that is also broken. This world isn't at one. So, there is now broken nature.

Floods and hurricanes and disease. Broken bodies that feel pain and wear away and break and suffer and die. And broken relationships.

We've now become separated from each other in this world. We were meant to be a united humanity. But now we've become separated. We're against each other. That there are now feuds and falling out.

And violence and wars. This is what's going on in Venezuela. Right? It's all from this. And so, from our sin, we have broken everything.

[25:41] From this. This is the source of it. From this comes the breaking of the whole world. And so, what is meant to be a united creation, at one with God, it has become...

Well, let's just neaten up a bit. It's become this. It's just a bit of a neater version of this. Okay? It has become this.

Wrath on God's part. Debt. A huge sin debt on ours. And a broken relationship. Right? It's not this nice, united God and man.

No. It is a one-way direction of wrath. And this, this is the problem of the world right now. This is the heart of why everything is the way that it is.

Humanity is in a guilty sin debt before a holy, angry God. And the world has become separated from him. This is the problem of our friends and colleagues and neighbours and the whole world.

[27:01] And yes, there are lots of other problems that we face in this world. We're miserable. We lack meaning. Our hearts are all messed up.

There are wars and suffering. But actually, all these other problems stem from this. This is the heart of it.

We are no longer right with God. And when you separate yourself from the God of life, of course, all these other problems are going to flow from it. But the heart of the issue is how we stand before God.

We are not at one with him. And every other culture and religion out there knows that this world is broken. Everyone knows something isn't right.

Everyone's trying to find a solution to this. But none of these solutions are working. Because they don't realise that this is the problem. This is the source of it.

[28:06] It's all actually about being not at one with God. And so what is the greatest need of the world right now? We need this brokenness between God and man to be resolved.

We need to be at one. That is to say we need atonement. And this is the second point to see today. We need atonement at one-ment. So let's see what we have so far. You can think there are three aspects to this problem.

The first, first of all, you can see one problem. There is debt. Our debts need to be paid. The price of death needs to be given to God.

Or in other words, we need redemption. Now the word redemption might be familiar to us as Christians we hear it but let's think about what redemption really means redemption means to ransom okay a redemption is a ransom so think about the films think about Die Hard doesn't have a ransom in it think of an action film with a ransom right so someone is kidnapped uh rush hour there we go rush hour um someone is kidnapped and the kidnappers might put a ransom price on their heads you know pay us one million pounds and then the hostage can go free and if you pay that million pounds so that million pounds that's the ransom cost and if you pay that money that hostage is ransomed they are redeemed that is a redemption okay well in a similar way we need the price on our heads the price of death the curse of law breaking we need that to be paid for us remember we are trapped hostages to our sin and guilt and debt and so we need redemption redemption and this is what Jesus says the atonement is all about so so look at Mark 10 for even the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many and you can read the word ransom here is redemption okay in it's sometimes translated redemption okay we need redemption but also that there's another aspect to this central problem um God's wrath needs to be

satisfied god's wrath it needs to be appeased pacified stopped or in other words we need propitiation okay i think i'm sorry right propitiation now this is a funny word we don't often hear it a lot but propitiation it basically means god's wrath is satisfied pacified ended okay this is how john speaks of the atonement in one john four in this is love not that we have loved god but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins he sent his son to be the one that appeases god's wrath if we're to escape death escape punishment we need this wrath to go that this cannot remain there and so we need propitiation and thirdly that there's a third aspect to this problem our relationship needs to be restored we need to be brought back to god in other words we need reconciliation reconciliation and that's how the apostle paul speaks of christ's work so look at 2 corinthians 5 in christ god was reconciling the world to himself and this is relational language isn't it reconciling so if two friends have fallen out that they're not speaking but then someone brings them together and they have a meeting and they work

[32:58] things out and they become friends again what do we say about the relationship those two people we say that they have been reconciled reconciliation is when two parties are brought back together well god and man needs to be reconciled and these three things here these these are the three uh aspects of the problem and so these three elements of what we need this is what we mean by atonement okay this this all these things together this is atonement these are the three aspects of the atonement you could say uh this is these three things are what is involved in atonement and this is the great need of the world we need redemption from our sin we need god's wrath to be propitiated and we need to be reconciled with god this is atonement okay and you can probably already tell these things are related right these aren't just three kind of like floating aspects of a problem no they're all kind of interconnected and related so our wrath god's wrath against us it means we're not reconciled doesn't it right so wrath it creates that it is a it is an aspect of that division right we're divided because there's wrath and we have a debt which uh which means we're not right with god so there's division and that debt is god's wrath god's the the debt that we must receive also the punishment that we must receive is god's wrath right death it it's the wrath of god okay so all these things are kind of interconnected and related but but they're they they emphasize different aspects of what is needed in the atonement all of this is involved but they're just different aspects and so the atonement this this is the heart of what we need this is the heart of what the world needs and so no wonder when it comes to christ's work of salvation the atonement the cross it's no wonder that the cross lies at the heart of that work paul made known christ and him crucified this is the heart of the gospel because this is the the heart of what we need we need atonement and so what we have here we have now set up the need and the categories of what is involved in in the atonement and next week i want us to see how christ's death actually achieves all this okay so if this is the need these are the categories how does christ's death actually achieve this how does the cross actually bring about atonement for us so we're going to look at that next week but for now this is this is the background um that gives meaning to the cross and so i'm going to leave in a bit of a cliffhanger today because we're going to get on to the cross next week but to finish i want us to ask okay this is what is needed but is this necessary okay it's needed but is it necessary can't god can't god solve the problem of sin some other way right so uh look at this quote from richard dawkins

he wants to ask something uh uh pretty much like this he said if god wanted to forgive our sins why didn't he just forgive them why did he have to have his son tortured or we can phrase that question um in terms of these categories that we have here right why do we need redemption why can't god just ignore the debt why do we need propitiation can't god just stop being angry at sinners was there some other way god could deal with the problem of sin what was the atonement was it just a

good solution to the problem of the world or is the atonement a necessary solution to the problem of the world well i want us to see that the atonement is absolutely necessary and the reason is because of who god is so look again at numbers 14 the lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love forgiving iniquity and transgression but he will by no means clear the guilty visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation god cannot just ignore the guilty he can't let the guilty go scot free and why well it's to do with who he is his character deuteronomy 32 god is the rock his work is perfect for all his ways are justice a god of faithfulness and without iniquity just and upright is he so do you see what god is like he's just god is the god of perfect justice and so in short god is too holy and too righteous and too just to simply ignore sin and sweep it under the rug and we would think that way too as well so if there is an evil in this world a theft a burglary and a judge knew about it but the judge just let it go we would say that is unjust that's wrong that isn't right that is a fault in the judge well in the scales of god's justice it would be wrong for god to know about sin know about our law breaking and just ignore it in fact god would cease to be holy if he just decided our sin doesn't matter anymore i can sweep that under the rug no to ignore sin it's to say it doesn't matter but god is too holy and too just to do that and so the debt of sin cannot just be ignored it must be redeemed in some way god's wrath can't just stop it needs to land somewhere and god can't just leave his enemies to run around and not be dealt with there needs to be reconciliation and so atonement is absolutely necessary for sinners to be saved so

Dawkins question if god wanted to forgive our sins why didn't he just forgive them well he can forgive our sins wonderfully he can but forgiveness must come through atonement but a question remains if this debt can't just disappear and if this wrath can't just disappear and we can't pay that debt and we can't handle that wrath how how can we find atonement atonement well what we need is a sacrifice atonement can only happen by something or someone else being sacrificed as a substitute for us the debt needs to be paid somehow the wrath needs to land somewhere and so we need a sacrifice to step in for us and i wonder who that could be come again next week and we will think deeply about the cross

I think we've got a bit of time yeah we've got one minute for questions