

# Atonement at the Cross



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“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13, 14, NIV).

# Atonement-at- the-Cross Acrostic

## INTRODUCTION

Col. 1:13, 14

This week we will delve into the nature of the atonement as it relates to the cross. May the acrostics below help us understand the remaining lessons of this quarter:

**A** – *Acceptance*. Read 1 Timothy 1:15. The truth that Jesus came to die on the cross for our sins is worthy of belief.

**T** – *Trust*. Read Proverbs 3:5. We should trust Jesus to accomplish in us what He has done on the cross.

**O** – *Obedience*. Read Psalm 119:33. We need to obey His will to be able to return our praises and gratitude to Him for His death on the cross.

**N** – *Nurture*. Read Psalm 144:11. God's guidance and care will give us the opportunity to grow and expand our horizons.

**E** – *Exchange*. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3. Christ's death is a substitution. He died the second death for us.

**M** – *Mend*. Read Ecclesiastes 3:7. Christ's atonement mends our brokenness and binds our wounds.

**E** – *Expiate*. Read Leviticus 16:15, 16. The high priest sacrificed

the goat and sprinkled its blood as a symbol of Christ's blood which removes whatever sins we have committed

**N** – *Navigate*. Read John 5:39. To learn what the cross does for us by way of atonement, we must continually study our way through God's Word.

**T** – *To reconcile*. Read Romans 5:8–11. The cross reconciles us to God.

God's love is absolutely amazing! It is through His atonement at the cross that we are truly blessed and saved from our sins. With this in mind, may you still find time to explore your Bible and look for the real meaning of the cross:

**C** – *Conciliate*. Read Romans 3:25, 26.

**R** – *Redemption*. Read Galatians 3:10–14.

**O** – *Offer Ransom*. Read Mark 10:45.

**S** – *Sacrifice*. Read Hebrews 9:26.

**S** – *Savior*. Read 2 Samuel 22:3.

He died the second death  
for us.

# A Torture Chamber of Death

Sunday  
November 30

## EVIDENCE

Mark 14:32–42; John 19

Dr. Keith Maxwell, a trauma physician, examined the evidence of the crucifixion from a medical standpoint. As Christ was in the Garden of Gethsemane, His body began to experience a rare phenomenon called hemathidrosis. This is when the small capillaries that surround the sweat glands burst. As these burst, the person actually bleeds into the sweat glands. The sweat is then mixed with the blood and the person literally sweats blood. Christ didn't bleed to death during this process, because the cool night air helped to coagulate His blood. However, the evidence of the blood would have been on His skin.

Maxwell also examined the historical method of scourging. A scourging victim would be stripped of his clothing, his hands tied on a pike above his head. As the lash struck the back, the damage was inflicted across the arms, down the shoulders and back, across the bare buttocks, down the back of the legs and calves, all the way to the heels. A scourging was typically 39 lashes with a whip that had nine leather thongs with a piece of lead and bone attached to the end. The bone would cut into the skin and then dig into the muscle as it was lashed across the victim's back. Maxwell estimates that Jesus

**He was probably in a state of shock.**

would have needed about 2,000 stitches to close the wounds that were opened during the lashing He received.

By the time Christ was on the way to Golgotha, He was probably in a state of shock. At the cross He was forced to put His shredded back against a splinter-filled beam. In order to keep breathing, He had to scrape His back up that beam to be in a position to take in air. Each movement like this brought more agony. The dehydration, insects, and heat of the day made things even more miserable.

The physical torture was more than what can be described in this short section. However, as we think about the physical agony Jesus bore for us, the atonement should become even more precious to us.

## REACT

1. After reading some of the evidence of what Christ suffered physically, how does it affect your view of the atonement He made for your sins?

2. In a society that is becoming hardened to the violence we see on the news, etc., how can we keep our hearts softened toward what Christ did for us?

## Backdrop of Christ's Sacrifice

### LOGOS

Matt. 26:37, 38; 27:45–55; Luke 22:39–46; John 19:28–30

When I was in college a theology professor explained the meaning of atonement as “at-one-ment”—a state of being “at one,” or in agreement. This definition denotes harmony in relationships that result in reconciliation. And reconciliation is what the cross of Christ is all about. The cross provided a way by which we could be restored to God. In order for us to better understand the meaning of Christ’s atonement, we will reflect today on the experience of Jesus in Gethsemane and during His crucifixion.

### Longing for Companionship and Sympathy (Matt. 26:37, 38; Luke 22:39–46; John 19:28–30)

Preceding His crucifixion, Jesus invited the disciples to an olive grove, called Gethsemane, which means “oil press.” Throughout His ministry, Jesus had frequently resorted to such places for meditation, prayer, and rest. Now, just before His death, He longed for human companionship and sympathy to accompany Him in such activities. Entering the garden, He asked Peter, James, and John to go with Him a bit farther.

**He was dehydrated; but might He also have been thirsting for righteousness to be accomplished through His suffering?**

These three disciples enjoyed a more intimate association with Him than the other disciples did. They were with Him when He raised Jairus’s daughter (Luke 8:51) and at His transfiguration (Matt. 17:1, 2)—the time of special revelation of His divinity.

### The Cup and Cause of Jesus’ Heavy Grief (Luke 22:39–46)

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus begged, “‘Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine’ ” (Luke 22:42, NLT). This prayer teaches us that it is never wrong to express our true feelings to God.

The cup Jesus spoke of referred to the terrible physical agony He knew He would endure and to the mental and spiritual anguish He would suffer as He faced the prospect of eternal separation from His Father as He took upon Himself the penalty for humanity’s sin. No wonder He needed to pray!

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Jesus' physical suffering was the visible reflection of the spiritual suffering He was experiencing—spiritual suffering brought upon by bearing the sins of all humanity. He seemed to be shut out from the light of God's presence and His Father's love. And now He was numbered with the transgressors and the guilt of fallen humanity.

### **Being the Penalty for Humanity's Sins (Matt. 27:45–55; John 19:28–30)**

From nine in the morning till noon, Jesus hung on the cross. At midday, darkness fell across the land until the ninth hour—three o'clock in the afternoon. At that time, nature testified to the gravity of Jesus' death. The darkness on that Friday afternoon was both physical and spiritual. While Jesus' friends and enemies alike fell silent in the encircling gloom, He cried, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Matt. 27:46, NLT). Jesus was not questioning God, but was quoting the first line of Psalm 22, a deep expression of anguish He felt as He took on the sins of the world, causing Him to believe He would be eternally separated from His Father.

After this, and knowing that all things were now accomplished that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst." He was dehydrated; but might He also have been thirsting for righteousness to be accomplished through His suffering?

Thus, the soldiers soaked a sponge in a jar of vinegar and touched the sponge to His lips. When Jesus received the sour wine, He declared, "It is finished." Then He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. The plan of redemption, which was laid before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20), was completed according to schedule. Despite his many and varied attempts, Satan could not stop the plan. Christ's victory assures salvation for any man, woman, and child who accepts it. Jesus came to finish God's work of atonement. He came to pay in full the penalty for our sins. Now those who believe in His death and resurrection can fully approach God and live eternally with Him.

### **REACT**

Find time each day for the rest of this week to meditate on Christ's suffering upon the cross. As you do, remember that He was willing to suffer so horrendously because He loves you so graciously.

Tuesday  
December 2

# The Illumination of Christ's Character

## TESTIMONY

Matt. 16:24

"Let the cross of Christ be made the science of all education, the center of all teaching and all study. Let it be brought into the daily experience in practical life. . . . Every thought will be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. With the apostle Paul they will be able to say:

"'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.' Galatians 6:14."<sup>1</sup>

"The more we study the divine character in the light of the cross, the more we see mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness blended with equity and justice, and the more clearly we discern innumerable evidences of a love that is infinite and a tender pity surpassing a mother's yearning sympathy for her wayward child."<sup>2</sup>

"Love for souls for whom Christ died means crucifixion of self. He who is a child of God should henceforth look upon himself as a link in the chain let down to save the world, one with Christ in His plan of mercy, going forth with Him to seek and save the lost. The Christian is ever to realize that he has consecrated himself to God, and

that in character he is to reveal Christ to the world. The self-sacrifice, the sympathy, the love, manifested in the life of Christ are to reappear in the life of the worker for God."<sup>3</sup>

**"It is our privilege also to glory in the cross."**

"Christ, after having redeemed man from the condemnation of the law, could impart divine power to unite with human effort."<sup>4</sup>

"Through the cross we learn that the heavenly Father loves us with a love that is infinite. . . . It is our privilege also to glory in the cross, our privilege to give ourselves wholly to Him who gave Himself for us. Then, with the light that streams from Calvary shining in our faces, we may go forth to reveal this light to those in darkness."<sup>5</sup>

## REACT

1. How can we illuminate those in darkness with the light "that streams from Calvary"?

2. Where would humanity be today without the cross? Why can there be no solution to the world's serious problems without Jesus' sacrifice on the cross?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 320.

2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 15.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 417.

4. *Patriarch and Prophets*, p. 64.

5. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 210.

# Staying Close to God

## HOW-TO

Matt. 26:37, 38; Luke 22:39–46; John 19:28–30

She clutched the Bible with her hands, unsure of what lay inside it. She felt nobody loved her or could give her the hope she needed. She closed her eyes and fought the doubts that began to surface. Had God forgotten her? To let the devil win would mean defeat. So she began to pray, escaping from the doubts and clinging to her faith. God was not leaving her now or ever. How does a person succeed in atonement or reconciliation with God? Here are a few steps:

*Arm yourself with faith.* Read Matthew 26:37, 38. These verses remind us to overcome the sorrows, doubts, and obstacles that threaten to separate us from God by watching and praying and accepting God's will, even when we don't understand it.

*Spend time in prayer with friends.* In times of trouble it helps to know that someone is there to listen and give us hope. Christ experienced unbelievable sorrow because many of those He loved were preparing to betray Him. God heard His Son's cry and gave Him strength because of Christ's faith. Praying with friends strengthens our faith and allows our hearts to be in connection with Him. The devil is eagerly waiting for us to give up our faith. He smells the stench of doubt and preys on people's minds to lure them away from their Father. We can be strengthened in whatever struggles we may be facing through prayer. It says in the Bible that when we are weak He is strong. God offers us that gift which leads to victory. Read Mark 14:33, 34.

*Run from temptation.* Getting away from temptations requires prayer. As we pray, God is able to impart strength to us when we need it. Read Luke 22:40–44.

*Remove all barriers.* Atonement through God is accomplished by getting rid of anything that prevents us from having a connection with Him. When we submit our lives to God, He is able to lead us to true happiness and victory over the struggles we face. By submitting our lives to God, we are lead to true happiness and victory over the struggles we face. We may not know or understand the reason for our struggles, but He is always there. Read Matthew 28:20.

Had God forgotten her?

## REACT

1. How does accepting Christ's salvation for our lives lead to atonement with God?

2. The word *atonement* means at-one-ment with Jesus. What does being at-one-ment with Jesus mean to you?

Thursday  
December 4

# Accepting His Victorious Tragedy

## OPINION

Luke 15:11–32

What do you see in your mind when you encounter the word *atonement*? I see a son wasting his life on worldly pleasures, turning his back on the values his parents taught him and breaking their hearts. I also see that in spite of everything, his parents are willing to do whatever it takes to save him from doom.

In the parable of the prodigal son, a father had a young adult son who asked for his inheritance, left home with it, and squandered it away on frivolous living. But when his funds ran out, he was reduced to feeding pigs for a living. Then one day, he thought of being reunited with his father. So he left the pigpen and began the journey home. When he arrived, the first thing he saw was his father running toward him with open arms. Read what happens next in Luke 15:21–24.

Just like the prodigal's story, the son I see in my mind, also shall have a celebration when he decides to heed the call of God and his parents to return to the fold. It's so amazing to know just how much our parents can love us.

**Atonement is not merely understanding its meaning.**

What's more amazing, however, is that God, our heavenly Father, loves us even more than our earthly parents. He sent His only begotten Son to suffer and to die on the cross to redeem us from eternal death.

What an incredible gift this is. And just as the prodigal son accepted it, why should we not accept it, for the gift leads to reconciliation with God.

Understanding atonement as the incarnation, life, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ, or as the duty and death of Christ on behalf of sinners, or as the sacrificial works of Jesus for sinners, or in whatever way we define it, will not matter at all. The power of His atoning death will make sense only as we hold it dear in our hearts, only as it bears fruit in our lives.

Therefore, atonement is not merely understanding its meaning. It must also be about applying it to our lives, living it without doubt.

## REACT

1. To save us from our sins, why did God choose such a gruesome death for His Son?
2. How does one properly show that he or she has accepted Christ's atonement?
3. How far will this acceptance lead you in terms of your spiritual journey?

# The Ultimate Paradox

## EXPLORATION

Rom. 5:9–11; 1 Cor. 15:17–21

## CONCLUDE

In countless small and large ways, sin separates us from God—and ultimately from each other. It robs us of the divine image God created us to reflect. It warps and distorts our relationships. And if it weren't for the cross, we'd simply get what we deserve.

The cross was God's solution to sin. Jesus endured the agony of utter severance from God so that no one would ever need to. In the ultimate paradox, Jesus' temporary separation from God brings us all together forever. When the beauty of the cross lives within us, it transforms us from the inside out and inspires us to reach out to others. We are a new creation called to spread the good news and share the ministry of reconciliation.

Jesus was willing to bear the cross because He couldn't bear to live without us.

## CONSIDER

- Painting or sketching an artwork illustrating the concept of a new creation.
- Researching the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of people in your church and broader community. What are some ways you can practice a ministry of reconciliation that would actually make a difference?
- Writing a letter to God, telling Him how the power of the cross has affected your life and laying out any questions you still struggle with.
- Creating a daily prayer list of people to intercede for (perhaps especially those with whom you have the greatest barriers) that they may experience the cross's atoning power for themselves.
- Discussing what the cross means to someone who's been a positive spiritual influence in your life.
- Hiking to a quiet place to reflect and pray, as Jesus did to fortify Himself spiritually in the years before the cross.

## CONNECT

Rev. 14:1–3 and 15:1–4.