

A Simple Guide to Big Words

Text: Ephesians 2:13–16

Topic: Atonement

Big Idea: Atonement is the work of Jesus to reconcile and redeem the relationship between people and God.

Application Point: Through atonement, the believer can live in meaningful relationship with a holy and just God.

Talking Points:

1. One of the primary themes of the Bible, and our big word of the week, is atonement. Atonement is the work of Jesus to reconcile and redeem the relationship of people to God. Atonement (at-one-ment) explains well the theology behind such restoration, for it suggests that God and humanity can relationally be 'at one' again".
2. In the Old Testament, the work of atonement was most often accomplished through the sacrifice of animals. In Genesis 3:21, the first act of atonement is made by the literal "covering up" of Adam and Eve's nakedness. The mess they made in the garden was atoned for through an animal's bloodshed to provide garments for them. With the introduction of the law, sacrifice became the primary means for God's people to reconcile with God (Exodus 32:30; Leviticus 4:26, 5:16). An innocent party, the animal, would take the place and punishment of the guilty. In our passage from Ephesians, we learn that we have been "brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). Jesus brought us "peace" (v. 15) and reconciled us to God "through the cross" (v. 16). Jesus paid the price, as the sacrificial "Lamb of God" (John 1:29), so we could be in right relationship with God again.
3. Animal sacrifice in the Old Testament was never the end-all of God's plan for reconciliation with humanity (Hebrews 10:1–4). It was a glimpse towards the ultimate atoning work of Jesus. Atonement means to cover over, and it was Jesus's blood that covered our sin, through his sacrifice on the cross. The Bible Project gives a great big picture view of sacrifice and atonement https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_OIRWGLdnw .
4. We can't talk about atonement without acknowledging the wrath of God (Romans 2:4–5). God rightly stands in opposition to evil. There is a tendency to think that God is like you and me, that he gets angry and wants to punish us or delights in seeing us get what we deserve. God's wrath in the Bible is never the self-indulgent, irritable thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil. God is angry only when anger is called for. God's wrath is an outflowing of his righteousness, a righteousness that demands justice from the humanity that has rebelled against him and turned away from his standards of goodness, love, and a life of holiness.
5. God is always loving, but he is also just and holy. A respected judge can't free a guilty person, even if it is his own child, and keep his reputation as a fair and just judge intact. He has to rule that the person is guilty. In the same way, God can't come back with a "not guilty" verdict, when he and we both know we are guilty and fall short of God's standard (Romans 3:10–18). However, God does make a way to pay the penalty for us. Though we are guilty, he pays the penalty that was due. We will talk about this more in the weeks ahead.
6. When we think about God's work of atonement, we are faced with our own inadequacies and sins. We don't live up to God's standard. We do the wrong thing, even when we try to do the right thing. It is humbling to be helpless to save ourselves. We cannot disguise our brokenness. Atonement is that it made way for our salvation. Christ went willingly to the cross, came out triumphant over evil and death, paying a debt that we could never pay, and allowed us to find reconciliation with God. He healed all our brokenness and made us whole. It is a gift we did not deserve, but one we should accept with gratitude. Atonement means that we can humbly submit our lives to God, who showered us with such undeserved love; the believer's only response is to say, "Thank you!" and live in light of his great love. Because of atonement, we can be confident that God is for us. We can live in freedom from our past and be hopeful for our future. We no longer have to be good enough, smart enough, athletic enough, kind enough, pretty enough, rich enough, or whatever enough to make God love us and want to be in relationship with us. Through God's work of atonement, the striving can cease, and the living can begin. God is one with us, through the love of the Father, the willing offering of Jesus's blood, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.