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Making amends

1 John: Confidence and faith - Session 3

The word 'atonement' means to give satisfaction or make amends.¹

Q1. How do you see people reconciling themselves to bad deeds they have done in the past?

1 John 2:1-6 – written by the Apostle John, within 60 years of Jesus' lifetime

1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

3 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. 4 The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

Q2. According to John, what kind of atonement for sin is required?

Long before Jesus walked the earth, God's people, the Jews, knew that atonement for sin was possible through the sacrifice of an animal on their behalf. How did this work? Well, God had told them: '*... the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.*' (Leviticus 17:11)

This helps us to understand why Jesus had to die to be a sacrifice for sin.

¹ Collins Gem English Dictionary, London: Collins & Sons, 1980.

Q3. Why could God accept Jesus' sacrifice for sin? (Hint: It has something to do with Jesus being described as the 'Righteous One')

Q4. How do we know this sacrifice for atonement was successful?

'Atonement' was the name – and concept – in a popular novel made into a feature film starring Keira Knightly.² In the book/film, the central character Briony Tallis makes amends for a lie in her girlhood that hurts her older sister by writing a bestseller novel with her older sister as the heroine.

Q5. From where you stand, do you agree that for someone trying to reconcile themselves to a bad deed done in the past, it is a little easier if they have a God to forgive them?

Questions for Ian McEwan (author of "Atonement")

A Sinner's Tale

Interviewer: It seems to me that the impulse to atone is a religious one, and yet you are a self-declared atheist. (...)

McEwan: Yes, I am an atheist, and probably Briony is, too. **Atheists have as much conscience, possibly more, than people with deep religious conviction, and they still have the same problem of how they reconcile themselves to a bad deed in the past. It's a little easier if you've got a god to forgive you.**

Interviewer: Not necessarily. Faith in itself is not easy to sustain.

McEwan: Well, we won't get into that.

Getting back to John's letter ...

1 John 5:13

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Note: By "know" John means that his readers might have greater confidence and assurance in what they believe.

²Questions for Ian McEwan, *A Sinner's Tale*, New York Times, Interview by DEBORAH SOLOMON, Published: December 2, 2007.

Q6. How does this section from 1 John on sin and obedience help the readers with their confidence and assurance?

Q7. What if someone says they are a follower of Jesus but there are areas of their life that are off-limits to God and the way he wants them to live?

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