

Brought to you by



**CITY BIBLE FORUM**

*Ask the bigger questions*

[citybibleforum.org](http://citybibleforum.org)

# Making amends

## 1 John: Confidence and faith - Session 3

*To show that relationship with God requires satisfaction for failures (sin). Trying harder will not provide satisfaction but will be a result of knowing that satisfaction has been made. A changing life builds confidence that faith is real. - from 1 John: 2:1-6.*

The word 'atonement' means to give satisfaction or make amends.<sup>1</sup>

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

· A variety of means: performing good deeds (hoping that the good will outweigh or at least counter the bad), justifying their own actions (those they wronged got what they deserved), punishing themselves (they become their own judge and executioner) etc.

**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?**

· It requires Jesus to be an atoning sacrifice. It's not about us performing good deeds, justifying our own actions or punishing ourselves.

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*

---

<sup>1</sup> Collins Gem English Dictionary, London: Collins & Sons, 1980.

*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.

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

- a) The problem: We sin. Sin will be punished. We need something/ someone to make amends/atone for our sins. We can't do this ourselves.
- b) Jesus is the 'Righteous One' in the sense that he was completely moral, just, upright, and abiding of God's commands to love Him and others. He is in the right with God. He doesn't need to atone for his own sins.
- c) Because Jesus was in the right with God he was in the unique position to offer to help us with our problem. Helping us would involve death... because death is required to atone for sin (see quote from Leviticus).
- d) So by his life and death Jesus becomes the sin sacrifice that God accepts.

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

· Jesus is no longer dead but alive, meaning he can speak in our defense. It's as if when we sin, thereby rightly deserving God's punishment, Jesus steps in and says the punishment has already been taken (by him). If Jesus couldn't speak in our defense then we would be left wondering whether his sacrifice was sufficient.

'Atonement' was the name – and concept – in a popular novel made into a feature film starring Keira Knightly.<sup>2</sup> 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?**

- The interviewer makes a fair point "faith in itself is not easy to sustain". Trusting that God has forgiven them – that atonement has been made – that the bad deed will no longer be held against them – can be a hard position to maintain in the face of doubt.
- For someone who does trust in Jesus, they just need to keep reminding themselves that Jesus will speak in their defense.

---

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

**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.

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

1. As followers of Jesus, they need to "walk as Jesus did". How do they know they are "in him" – followers of Jesus? By living the way Jesus wants them to. That they are doing this is evidence that their faith is real (personally true for them rather than evidence that the Christian faith is absolutely true)...this is confidence-building.
2. As followers of Jesus, they will still sin, and when they do, it's about confessing it and trusting that atonement has been made and Jesus will speak in their defence...this helps with assurance, that the sin they have just committed won't put their relationship with God in jeopardy.

**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?**

· "The man who says "I know him" but doesn't do what he commands is a liar". So if someone claims to be a follower of Jesus but isn't interested in making changing in certain areas of their life – you'd have to question whether they have a real faith to begin with.

· Note – this is different from someone who is struggling to make changes – in that case they will be asking God for forgiveness and help to change. The character of life as a follower of Jesus is to live like Jesus did. The reality of life as a follower of Jesus is that sometimes this will be hard – but this doesn't change what the character of life should be, and what one strives for.

Published 9 October 2014  
Copyright, City Bible Forum<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> COPYRIGHT City Bible Forum (citybibleforum.org) is a ministry of Evangelising Commerce Inc (NSW), 2013. This material may be reproduced free-of-charge for non-profit use only as long as this copyright notice appears, and the content is not modified in any way. For any other use, or to modify the material, please contact us to arrange copyright permission, which may involve a small fee to help finance the production of such resources by the staff of City Bible Forum. Contact info@citybibleforum.org or tel: (02) 9251 1166 or GPO Box 3266, Sydney NSW 2001