

1 JOHN

THIS IS HOW WE KNOW

Session 2:

Title: We know that Jesus died for us

Passage: 1 John 1:5-2:2

Focus: Doctrine of the Atonement

Timing: 20-30 minutes, then leading into ministry

Buzzgroups: These are questions to discuss in pairs or small groups. Use your discussions to inform your time of prayer ministry at the end.

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

Icebreaker:

Have you ever taken the blame for something that you didn't do? Maybe for a sibling, friend or someone at work? (Tell each other your stories and why you did it.)

Taking the hit for someone else is not an easy thing to do but it is powerful. It might be easier to do it for someone you love but it's harder to do it for someone you don't know. This week, we will be exploring the Doctrine of the Atonement, which includes the themes of: forgiveness, unconditional love, reconciliation and taking the hit for someone else.

Read the passage...1 John 1:5-2:2

BUZZGROUP

- What does 'atonement' mean?

Together, explore some themes to do with being separate from God, sins forgiven, debt paid and relationship restored. Explore the idea of atonement being understood as "at-one-ment" - i.e. of being at one with God.

1. Walking in light, not darkness

John begins this section of his letter by exploring the theme of darkness and light. He is clear from the beginning that God is light. In fact there is no darkness in Him at all. God as light speaks of His nature.



St Philip's

THIS IS HOW WE KNOW

A study in 1 John

The first thing God does in creation is say "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3) - His creation reflects the very essence of His being. Light also represents His holiness. As such, darkness represents the opposite of God and the Bible considers the opposite of God to be sin.

John then picks up the theme of fellowship again, which we discussed in Session 1, and ties it into the themes of darkness and sin. Fellowship with God, and fellowship with each other, comes through living in the truth, living in the light (1 John 1:6).

John suggests that if we want fellowship with God, we need to walk in the light. How do we walk in the light? John makes it clear at verse 7: it is the blood of Jesus, i.e. Jesus' sacrifice that enables us to walk in the light and be in fellowship with God.

The Christian understanding of a restored relationship with God is found in the Doctrine of Atonement. Let's take a look at some of its key themes:

i. Sin that separates

While we have been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) to enjoy a perfect relationship with Him of obedience and love, something has gone wrong and we no longer reflect His nature. The root of the problem is our rebellion, our desire for self over God.

It has been said that:

"If God made us in His own image, then we have returned the compliment."

That is, in essence, the problem. All sin is effectively an attack on the character of God. Humanity has rejected God as a 'transcendental interferer', as C. S. Lewis once called God, and instead has constructed a substitute in accordance with its likes and wants. We have separated ourselves from God and that not only impacts our relationship with Him, but our ability to reflect His image, His nature. So, we are no longer light but rather darkness. We no longer look like God because of our sin.

So how can we enjoy fellowship with the holy God of light? The answer is that we cannot do anything ourselves - we don't have the capacity to be good on our own account. No matter how hard we try, we simply can't make ourselves holy. But, happily, there is something that can be done and it is God who makes it possible.

So, what can be done?

ii. Sacrifice that restores

God's desire is that we return to a proper relationship with Him, for the separation that sin creates to be beaten and for fellowship with Him to be restored. Part of the reason that we cannot do it ourselves is that we are not obedient or holy. But there is one who is - God Himself, and as we discussed last time, in Jesus, God came to us and stepped into the gap.

Why did Jesus have to die? Why is sacrifice even necessary? It comes down to innocence, guilt and covenant. The Old Testament maps out the journey of God's relationship with

THIS IS HOW WE KNOW

A study in 1 John

His people, a relationship built on covenant, or promise. It is a promise established on grace, love and obedience, of commitment to each other and blessing because of that commitment.

But while God is perfect, we are not and so the people were unable to hold up their part of the deal. As is the case with us today, they constantly messed up and had to be forgiven by God in order to restore the relationship. The way in which this was done was through the sacrifice of a 'pure' animal, often a young goat or lamb, on which the sins of the people were symbolically laid by the priest. The blood does not represent death, but rather life and restoration.

In Jesus, as an incredible act of grace and love God provides Himself as the perfect, once-and-for-all sacrifice. As the goat takes on the sin of the people in the Old Testament, so Jesus takes on our sin and atones (steps up, steps in and makes right) for us.

iii. Reconciliation of relationship

The result is a clean slate and the restoration of our holiness. In being made holy, we are 'recreated' (effectively spiritually 'reborn') so that, again, we can reflect the image of our Creator. And therefore our relationship with God is restored to what it was always intended to be.

BUZZGROUP

- To what degree do you think it is possible to better yourself?

In your conversations, consider such things as self-help, striving to be better and whether the things that we try to do really get to the nub of the problem. Contrast ideas of helplessness, hopelessness and guilt with the truths of grace, gift and hope.

2. Stepping into the light

John continues his themes of light and darkness, sin and truth at verse 8. He says that we can't claim to be in fellowship with God and remain in the darkness: he says that this is not living in the truth but living a lie. John here is talking about denial – living sinfully despite claiming to be in fellowship with God.

Denial says that while we are sinning, it doesn't really matter to God. Denial may acknowledge an unrighteous lifestyle but fail to be convicted about that lifestyle. Denial either says: "I am not a sinner", or "I have not sinned".

Rick Warren has spoken about living a life of integrity. He says that integrity comes from the same root as 'integer', meaning one. Living a life of integrity therefore means that we are living our lives as one unit for God. Rick says, therefore, that we can't have a faith-life that is separate from our everyday-life, where anything goes.

THIS IS HOW WE KNOW

A study in 1 John

But there is another feature of the Doctrine of Atonement that offers us a way forward:

Love, Grace and Forgiveness

God is a God whose nature is love, whose grace is abundant and whose desire is to forgive, and we can have confidence in those things.

In our passage John says that a person in true fellowship with God will always allow the searchlight of God's truth to expose the parts of our lives that need to be left behind. And at verse 9, he offers the way to allow that light access to our dark places – confession.

The answer to denial is confession. Confession is getting things out in the open and allowing the God of light to have access and, through His love, grace and forgiveness, restore us to Him in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Confession works on two levels – private confession to God and confidential and grace-filled confession to each other.

James 5:16 says this:

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Both are based on the same premise:

"That was a sin, Lord. I recognise that it was wrong and I confess that I did it. I ask for your forgiveness and the power of the Spirit to keep me from its repetition."

BUZZGROUP

- Take a moment to think about the degree to which your Home Group is a community of openness, confession, forgiveness and hope.
- Think of ways in which you might be able to encourage each other to live like this together.

Explore the value of bringing things out of the darkness and shining the light of Jesus on them. In doing so, sin's power is taken away. It might be worth encouraging the group to commit to greater openness and establish some ground rules which might help to do so: e.g. confidence, respect, love, honouring each other and perhaps establishing contexts in which men can share with men and women with women.

3. Being a Kingdom Community

Wrap up the feedback from the above Buzzgroups discussion and start to cast a vision for your Home Group of a Kingdom Community where you disciple each other in a mutual relationship of grace, love, humility, confidence, compassion, forgiveness, commitment and worship.

THIS IS HOW WE KNOW

A study in 1 John

Where a community walks together in the light, they are walking in fellowship with God and each other. There is one further theme within the Doctrine of Atonement that makes this possible:

i. Sin no longer has a hold

Jesus' sacrifice is perfect, once-and-for-all and finished. Nothing more need be done – sin has been defeated and we can walk in the light. Forgiveness really is the final word. We are restored. A community of fellowship that walks in the light needs to be a forgiving community.

God is our model. In Hebrews 8:12 we read this remarkable account of how God's forgiveness works:

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.

It is significant that forgiveness does not require us to forget – a hard thing for us to do and arguably not technically possible for an omniscient God – but rather it is a decision to choose not to remember. To count the offence as nothing. To cultivate an unoffended heart.

It is grace that allows for forgiveness, forgiveness that makes confession possible, confession that leads to restoration and restoration that results in fellowship.

A Kingdom Community walks this way.

John finishes this passage with a reminder that a Kingdom Community acknowledges that Jesus died, not just for them, but for the world. The atonement is not exclusive but completely inclusive. There is no-one for whom Jesus did not die. The Doctrine of the Atonement provides us with a basis for a life that we should not only model in our Home Groups but also model to the world.

MINISTRY

Here are some suggestions for ministry following this talk. That said, ministry is most effective when it flows from the conversations within the Home Group during the evening.

- The starting point for forgiveness is repentance and the starting point for repentance is confession. Consider leading a time of confession to start the ministry response – either as silent, personal confession or, if people would like, as a time of open confession. Finish with thanksgiving.
- It can be hard to accept that we are forgiven and free. If appropriate, consider exploring freedom in the ministry time.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to restore any relationships that people may have which are broken or under strain.