

The Atonement

Chapter 12

The Atonement Is Necessary for Our Salvation

- Why is the Atonement necessary for our salvation?

Jesus Christ “came into the world . . . to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness; that through him all might be saved” (D&C 76:41–42). The great sacrifice He made to pay for our sins and overcome death is called the Atonement. It is the most important event that has ever occurred in the history of mankind: “For it is expedient that an atonement should be made; for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must unavoidably perish; . . . yea, all are fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement” (Alma 34:9).

The Fall of Adam brought two kinds of death into the world: physical death and spiritual death. Physical death is separation of the body and spirit. Spiritual death is separation from God. If these two kinds of death had not been overcome by Jesus Christ’s Atonement, two consequences would have resulted: our bodies and our spirits would have been separated forever, and we could not have lived again with our Heavenly Father (see 2 Nephi 9:7–9).

But our wise Heavenly Father prepared a wonderful, merciful plan to save us from physical and spiritual death. He planned for a Savior to come to earth to ransom (redeem) us from our sins and from death. Because of our sins and the weakness of our mortal bodies, we could not ransom ourselves (see Alma 34:10–12). The one who would be our Savior would need to be sinless and to have power over death.

For teachers: Simple charts and pictures can help class members or family members understand principles and doctrines. Consider making a chart with two columns, one labeled *Results of the Fall* and the other labeled *Blessings of the Atonement*. Use information from this chapter to fill in the chart.



Jesus Christ Was the Only One Who Could Atone for Our Sins

- Why was Jesus Christ the only one who could atone for our sins?

There are several reasons why Jesus Christ was the only person who could be our Savior. One reason is that Heavenly Father chose Him to be the Savior. He was the Only Begotten Son of God and thus had power over death. Jesus explained: “I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:17–18).

Jesus also qualified to be our Savior because He is the only person who has ever lived on the earth who did not sin. This made Him a worthy sacrifice to pay for the sins of others.

Christ Suffered and Died to Atone for Our Sins

- As you read this section, imagine yourself in the Garden of Gethsemane or at the cross as a witness of the suffering of Jesus Christ.

The Savior atoned for our sins by suffering in Gethsemane and by giving His life on the cross. It is impossible for us to fully understand how He suffered for all of our sins. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the weight of our sins caused Him to feel such agony that He bled from every pore (see D&C 19:18–19). Later, as He hung upon the cross, Jesus suffered painful death by one of the most cruel methods known to man.

How Jesus loves us, to suffer such spiritual and physical agony for our sake! How great the love of Heavenly Father that He would send His Only Begotten Son to suffer and die for the rest of His children. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

The Atonement and Resurrection Bring Resurrection to All

On the third day after His Crucifixion, Christ took up His body again and became the first person to be resurrected. When His friends went to seek Him, the angels who guarded His tomb told

them, “He is not here: for he is risen, as he said” (Matthew 28:6). His spirit had reentered His body, never to be separated again.

Christ thus overcame physical death. Because of His Atonement, everyone born on this earth will be resurrected (see 1 Corinthians 15:21–22). Just as Jesus was resurrected, our spirits will be reunited with our bodies, “that they can die no more . . . , never to be divided” (Alma 11:45). This condition is called immortality. All people who have ever lived will be resurrected, “both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous” (Alma 11:44).

- How has your knowledge of the Resurrection helped you?

The Atonement Makes It Possible for Those Who Have Faith in Christ to Be Saved from Their Sins

- Think about how the parable in this section helps us understand the Atonement. Whom do the people in the parable represent in our lives?

The Savior’s Atonement makes it possible for us to overcome spiritual death. Although all people will be resurrected, only those who accept the Atonement will be saved from spiritual death (see Articles of Faith 1:3).

We accept Christ’s Atonement by placing our faith in Him. Through this faith, we repent of our sins, are baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, and obey His commandments. We become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. We are forgiven and cleansed from sin and prepared to return and live forever with our Heavenly Father.

The Savior tells us, “For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer . . . even as I” (D&C 19:16–17). Christ did His part to atone for our sins. To make His Atonement fully effective in our lives, we must strive to obey Him and repent of our sins.

For teachers: Object lessons can help class members and family members understand principles and doctrines. To explain death and resurrection, consider this object lesson: Put your hand in a glove. Explain that a hand in a glove can be compared to a person’s spirit in his or her body. Take off the glove. Explain that this is like physical death—the spirit (the hand) and the body (the glove) are separated. Then put the glove back on your hand. Explain that this is like resurrection—the spirit and body are reunited.

President Boyd K. Packer of the Council of the Twelve gave the following illustration to show how Christ's Atonement makes it possible to be saved from sin *if* we do our part.

"Let me tell you a story—a parable.

"There once was a man who wanted something very much. It seemed more important than anything else in his life. In order for him to have his desire, he incurred a great debt.

"He had been warned about going into that much debt, and particularly about his creditor. But it seemed so important for him to do what he wanted to do and to have what he wanted right now. He was sure he could pay for it later.

"So he signed a contract. He would pay it off some time along the way. He didn't worry too much about it, for the due date seemed such a long time away. He had what he wanted now, and that was what seemed important.

"The creditor was always somewhere in the back of his mind, and he made token payments now and again, thinking somehow that the day of reckoning really would never come.

"But as it always does, the day came, and the contract fell due. The debt had not been fully paid. His creditor appeared and demanded payment in full.

"Only then did he realize that his creditor not only had the power to repossess all that he owned, but the power to cast him into prison as well.

" 'I cannot pay you, for I have not the power to do so,' he confessed.

" 'Then,' said the creditor, 'we will exercise the contract, take your possessions, and you shall go to prison. You agreed to that. It was your choice. You signed the contract, and now it must be enforced.'

" 'Can you not extend the time or forgive the debt?' the debtor begged. 'Arrange some way for me to keep what I have and not go to prison. Surely you believe in mercy? Will you not show mercy?'

“The creditor replied, ‘Mercy is always so one-sided. It would serve only you. If I show mercy to you, it will leave me unpaid. It is justice I demand. Do you believe in justice?’

“ ‘I believed in justice when I signed the contract,’ the debtor said. ‘It was on my side then, for I thought it would protect me. I did not need mercy then, nor think I should need it ever. Justice, I thought, would serve both of us equally as well.’

“ ‘It is justice that demands that you pay the contract or suffer the penalty,’ the creditor replied. ‘That is the law. You have agreed to it and that is the way it must be. Mercy cannot rob justice.’

“There they were: One meting out justice, the other pleading for mercy. Neither could prevail except at the expense of the other.

“ ‘If you do not forgive the debt there will be no mercy,’ the debtor pleaded.

“ ‘If I do, there will be no justice,’ was the reply.

“Both laws, it seemed, could not be served. They are two eternal ideals that appear to contradict one another. Is there no way for justice to be fully served, and mercy also?

“There is a way! The law of justice *can* be fully satisfied and mercy *can* be fully extended—but it takes someone else. And so it happened this time.

“The debtor had a friend. He came to help. He knew the debtor well. He knew him to be shortsighted. He thought him foolish to have gotten himself into such a predicament. Nevertheless, he wanted to help because he loved him. He stepped between them, faced the creditor, and made this offer.

“ ‘I will pay the debt if you will free the debtor from his contract so that he may keep his possessions and not go to prison.’

“As the creditor was pondering the offer, the mediator added, ‘You demanded justice. Though he cannot pay you, I will do so. You will have been justly dealt with and can ask no more. It would not be just.’

“And so the creditor agreed.

“The mediator turned then to the debtor. ‘If I pay your debt, will you accept me as your creditor?’

“‘Oh yes, yes,’ cried the debtor. ‘You save me from prison and show mercy to me.’

“‘Then,’ said the benefactor, ‘you will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible. I will provide a way. You need not go to prison.’

“And so it was that the creditor was paid in full. He had been justly dealt with. No contract had been broken.

“The debtor, in turn, had been extended mercy. Both laws stood fulfilled. Because there was a mediator, justice had claimed its full share, and mercy was fully satisfied” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1977, 79–80; or *Ensign*, May 1977, 54–55).

Our sins are our spiritual debts. Without Jesus Christ, who is our Savior and Mediator, we would all pay for our sins by suffering spiritual death. But because of Him, if we will keep His terms, which are to repent and keep His commandments, we may return to live with our Heavenly Father.

It is wonderful that Christ has provided us a way to be healed from our sins. He said:

“Behold, I have come unto the world . . . to save the world from sin.

“Therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive, for of such is the kingdom of God. Behold, for such I have laid down my life, and have taken it up again; therefore repent, and come unto me ye ends of the earth, and be saved” (3 Nephi 9:21–22).

- Ponder how you can show gratitude for the gift of the Atonement.

Additional Scriptures

- Alma 34:9–16 (Atonement necessary; sacrifice of God)
- 2 Nephi 9:7–12 (the Atonement saves us from physical and spiritual death)
- Romans 5:12–17 (by one came death, by one came life)

- Helaman 14:15–18 (purpose of Jesus’s death)
- Articles of Faith 1:3 (all may be saved)
- 1 Peter 1:18–20 (Jesus was foreordained)
- Matthew 16:21 (Jesus’s sacrifice was necessary)
- Luke 22:39–46 (Jesus’s suffering in the garden)
- 1 John 1:7 (Jesus cleanses from sin)
- 2 Nephi 9:21–22 (the Savior suffered for all people)
- Mosiah 16:6–8 (resurrection possible only through Jesus)
- Alma 11:40–45; Mormon 9:12–14 (all to be resurrected)
- Isaiah 1:18 (sins shall be made white)
- 1 Corinthians 15:40–44; Alma 40:23 (description of the Resurrection)