

This midweek study will explore the moral influence theory of the atonement. Use the following main points, Scriptures, teaching/discussion ideas, and questions to help students gain a better understanding of the essential doctrine for this session.

Essential Doctrine: Moral Influence Theory of Atonement

Other than humans and animals, the Bible mentions other beings God created—angels (who are also referred to in Scripture as “sons of God”), “holy ones,” “spirits,” “principalities,” and “powers.” In the original languages of the Bible, the word angel carries the meaning of a messenger, which indicates one of their primary reasons for existence. However, angels carry out a number of other functions throughout Scripture: bringing God glory, carrying out God’s plans and purpose, and reminding humanity that the unseen world is real.

1 The cross, as the picture of Jesus’ excellence, compels us to imitate Him (1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:10).

- ▶ Imagine a warden comes to a death row inmate and says that inmate is to be released; in exchange, the warden will be executed in the inmate’s place. Do you think this is a good plan for reforming the prisoner? Why or why not?
- ▶ Imagine that the prisoner has to watch the warden die. Do you think the prisoner would be more likely to reform? Why or why not?
- ▶ How does the warden-prisoner story parallel Jesus and us? Does Jesus’ death compel us to reform morally? Why or why not?

Read 1 Corinthians 2:2.

- ▶ What one thing did Paul resolve to know among the Corinthians? Why do you think he focused on the crucifixion and not the miracles or the teaching?
- ▶ What does this passage tell us about the importance of the crucifixion?
- ▶ Which of God’s attributes can we see in the crucifixion?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18.

- ▶ How do we become like Jesus? What attributes of Jesus do we see in the crucifixion? How should we adopt them?

Read Philippians 3:10.

- ▶ What do you think Paul meant when he said he wanted to be conformed to Jesus’ death? What moral changes should Jesus’ death produce in us?

2 Though the cross does influence us morally, this influence is not the atonement itself (Isa. 53:4-7; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Read Isaiah 53:4-7.

- ▶ In this prophecy of Jesus’ death for us, how did Isaiah explain the atonement? What terms did Isaiah use to describe what happened when Jesus died?
- ▶ So is the moral influence theory of the atonement sufficient to explain our salvation in itself? What must we add?

- ▶ Nevertheless, there is a moral influence element in the atonement, even in Isaiah’s description. Where do you see this moral influence idea in verse 7?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.

- ▶ How did Paul reinforce some of Isaiah’s ideas with this verse?

3 The cross should compel complete thanksgiving and praise toward God and love and compassion toward human beings, especially our enemies (Luke 23:34; Rom. 5:6-11; 1 Pet. 2:21-23).

- ▶ Who are some enemies you have in your life right now?
- ▶ Has one of your enemies, or someone you didn’t like, done something for you? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?
- ▶ Who was the greatest enemy you ever had? (Hint: Think really big.) How did God show love to you, His enemy?

Read Romans 5:6-11.

- ▶ How should we respond to God’s great love shown in Jesus’ death? How can we make verse 11 real in our lives today?
- ▶ Think back to when your enemy (or anyone) showed you grace. How did you treat other people immediately after?

Read 1 Peter 2:21-23.

- ▶ According to Peter, how should we treat those who mistreat us? Why? What example did he give us to follow?

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ John Harrigan said, “People need loving the most when they deserve it the least.” How does Jesus’ death exemplify this idea? Who deserves love the least in our lives? How can we imitate Jesus to them this week?