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The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).

The Doctrine

When taken to the hospital, the old herdsman was sick, blind, and dying. While he was there his granddaughter came every day and read to him; the old man enjoyed the soft sound of the child's voice. One day she found, in the room, a Bible left by a friend. She casually opened to 1 John 1 and began to read. He listened attentively, and when he heard the words "and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," he interrupted her.

The atonement is the biblical doctrine around which all others revolve.

"Tell me," he said, "is that really there?"

"Yes, Grandpa, it's there."

"Could you read it to me again?"

"'And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.'"

For a few seconds there was silence; then he asked, "Are you quite sure that's there, in that book?"

"Yes, Grandpa, quite sure."

"Please, take my hand and place my finger on that passage and read it to me again." As she did it, tears dripped down from his sightless eyes, and his voice was heard speaking with difficulty but with great assurance.

"My dear child . . . if anyone should ask you how I died, please tell them that I died . . . cleansed."

What this story shows is that the doctrine of atonement is not an abstract theory of salvation; it is, rather, the saving power of God in the lives of fallen, sinful beings.

What is atonement? In general, it could be said that the word *atonement* refers to the removal of any hindrance to fellowship with God. In a sense, atonement is the equivalent of reconciliation, but it also includes the idea of *expiation*, a fancy word that portrays the idea of removing any barrier that

of Atonement

exists between God and us. The doctrine of atonement emphasizes the sacrifice of Christ as the exclusive expiatory means by which the barrier between us and God—which is sin—is removed, leaving us reconciled to Him.

The atonement, in fact, is the biblical doctrine around which all others revolve. It is centered in Christ's life, death, resurrection, ascension, mediation, and return. It presupposes the presence of sin, our fundamental and desperate need of salvation, and God's loving disposition to save us.

A proper understanding of the biblical doctrine of God is also indispensable for understanding the atonement. It was God's love that made it possible to restore us to union and fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ. We should never give the impression that the death of Christ was needed in order to persuade God to love us. God sent Christ to die for us because He already loved us. The biblical doctrine of atonement is grounded in God's love for sinful and rebellious creatures.

The fullness of the benefits of the atonement is enjoyed only by those who, after being touched by the Holy Spirit, accept God's offer of salvation in Christ as the exclusive means of forgiveness and reconciliation. Their hearts are possessed by love and gratitude to God and Christ for this infinite sacrifice.

Thus, it's our sincere hope that this quarter, as you study the meaning of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, you will be moved toward a greater commitment to the One who suffered so much for us, so that whether you live or die, you can, like the old herdsman, do so in peace.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Practice, and Apply

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, practice, and apply. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Practice); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Practice: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Apply: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.