

## Introduction: What Does Reconciliation Mean? (15 mins)

Begin by discussing the concept of reconciliation in everyday life. What does it mean to mend a broken relationship? What actions or attitudes are typically involved? Think about examples from history, literature, or personal experience where reconciliation was needed. Transition to the theological context: In Christianity, 'atonement' addresses the broken relationship between humanity and God. How might this reconciliation be understood or achieved according to Christian belief? Jot down initial thoughts.

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## Activity 1: Defining Atonement & Biblical Roots (30 mins)

**Define Atonement:** Research and write down a clear definition of 'atonement' specifically within the Christian theological framework. Consider concepts like sacrifice, reconciliation, redemption, and propitiation.

**Biblical Exploration:** Christians look to the Bible for understanding atonement. Read and reflect on the following passages, noting how they might relate to the concept of reconciliation with God:

- Leviticus 16 (The Day of Atonement)
- Isaiah 53 (The Suffering Servant)
- Mark 10:45 ('...a ransom for many')
- Romans 3:21-26 (Righteousness through faith)
- Romans 5:6-11 (Reconciled through Christ's death)
- 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (Ministry of reconciliation)
- Hebrews 9:11-14, 23-28 (Christ as high priest and sacrifice)
- 1 John 4:9-10 (God's love and propitiation)

*Discussion Prompt:* Do these passages seem to present one single view of atonement, or are there different nuances and metaphors used? Note any recurring themes.

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## Activity 2: Journey Through History - Major Atonement Models (60 mins)

Throughout Christian history, theologians have developed different models to explain *how* they believe Christ's life, death, and resurrection achieved atonement. Research and summarize the following key historical models. For each, identify:

1. **Core Idea:** What is the central mechanism of atonement in this view?
2. **Key Proponent(s) & Era:** Who were major figures associated with this view, and when did it gain prominence? (e.g., Origen, Anselm, Abelard, Calvin, Gustaf Aulén)
3. **Metaphor/Analogy Used:** What image or analogy helps explain it (e.g., ransom payment, legal satisfaction, battle victory, demonstration of love)?
4. **Associated Bible Passages:** Which scriptures are often cited in support?

### Models to Research:

- **Ransom Theory / Christus Victor (Early Church; Revival):** Focus on Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil, possibly involving a 'ransom' paid.
  - **Satisfaction Theory (Anselm, Medieval Period):** Focus on Christ satisfying the demands of God's honor or justice offended by sin.
  - **Moral Influence Theory (Abelard, Medieval Period & Later):** Focus on Christ's life and death as the ultimate demonstration of God's love, inspiring humanity to turn back to God.
  - **Penal Substitution Theory (Reformation Era - Calvin, etc.):** Focus on Christ taking the
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punishment (penalty) that humanity deserved for its sins.

*Discussion Prompt:* Which model seems most prominent or familiar in contemporary Christian expressions you've encountered? Why might certain models gain or lose popularity in different historical periods?

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### **Activity 3: Social & Historical Impact (30 mins)**

The way a society or group understands atonement can influence its values, laws, and social structures. Consider and discuss:

- How might a 'Satisfaction' or 'Penal Substitution' view influence ideas about justice, law, and punishment in society?
  - How might a 'Moral Influence' view impact emphasis on ethics, social action, and demonstrating love?
  - How might a 'Christus Victor' view shape attitudes towards perceived evil forces or systemic injustice in the world?
  - Can you think of historical examples where theological debates about atonement might have intersected with social or political events? (e.g., Reformation debates, abolitionist movements drawing on themes of liberation).
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### **Conclusion & Reflection (15 mins)**

Review your notes on the different atonement models.

- Which theory or combination of theories do you find most compelling or resonant, and why?
- How does understanding the historical development of these ideas change your perspective?
- Summarize the key takeaway: Christian understandings of atonement are diverse and have evolved throughout history, using various metaphors (legal, relational, militaristic) to explain the concept of reconciliation with God through Christ.