

MR. MOODY'S BIBLE CLASS

A Twelve-Part Study in the Doctrines of the Christian Faith

by

Dwight Lyman Moody

“Mr. Moody’s Bible Class” was a special feature published in *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, a popular women’s magazine of the 1890s. For twelve months beginning in November 1896, evangelist D.L. Moody published Bible studies that defined the principles of the Christian faith and encouraged readers to engage in daily Scripture reading.

Mr. Moody designed these studies for both individual reflection and group discussion. Whether you’re studying alone or with others, take time to read the Scripture passages referenced and answer the reflection questions honestly before God.

These studies are ideal for personal devotions, small group Bible studies, Sunday school classes, or anyone seeking to deepen their understanding of foundational Christian doctrine.

The Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

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LESSON FOUR

THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

For nineteen hundred years the chief point of controversy between faith and unbelief has been the doctrine of the Atonement. Lying as it does at the very foundation of Christianity, it has been assailed in every age of church history, yet remains today the most universally accepted teaching of our faith. Upon the finished work of Christ's Atonement the entire structure of Christianity rests.

This truth has, perhaps, suffered as much from the misguided zeal of its friends as it has from the attacks of its enemies. The human theories which have been advanced in its defense have too often been at the expense of the Bible's teaching regarding the character of God.

It is a truth which we are to accept, but are not commanded to understand. Christianity is a faith, not a theory. Its truths are given by revelation and are not the result of speculation; the only infallible guide to which we may refer is, "What saith the Scriptures?"

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That the Bible contains passages that I do not understand is to me a strong proof of its Divine origin. If I could read the Bible as I do any other book, what would prevent me from writing a Bible myself? Thank God that in His Word I find heights that I cannot reach, depths that I cannot fathom, breadths that I cannot measure. We cannot hope to study the revelation of God's Word without finding what is superhuman, for, as Paul wrote to Timothy, "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness." (1 Timothy 3:16)

RECONCILIATION TO GOD

Atonement is defined as reconciliation, and has come to mean the terms upon which man is reconciled to God. The false idea that God hates sinners is the great human error of the ages. The Bible again and again emphasizes the fact that man is to be reconciled to God.

Let a man commit an injury to another, and he who has done the wrong usually harbors the bitterest feeling. And so when man broke God's law it was man who had to be reconciled. Instead of Adam calling to God for reconciliation, we read that God came in mercy and sought for the one who had wronged Him, to offer then and there the promise of the Saviour, by whose death man would escape the verdict of justice.

No greater proof have we of God's love than the Atonement. The Apostle John tells us in these words:

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." (1 John 4:9)

God hates sin because He loves the sinner, just as a parent hates a disease that takes hold upon a child. The greater a parent's love for the child, the greater the hatred for its disease. And so from the price God paid to reconcile man to Himself, we see His yearning fatherly love for His creation, and His hatred of what marred His handiwork. Let us, then, keep in mind the character of God as given us by the One who knew Him best when revealed among men, in the passage, "He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love." (1 John 4:8)

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The Atonement was a transaction which took place between God the Father and God the Son nearly nineteen hundred years ago. It is right here, I believe, that so much confusion has been caused in the acceptance of this truth. Teachers who would never for a moment undertake to explain the relations of the Holy Trinity have set forth elaborate theories of this doctrine. Since the relations of the Godhead are beyond our comprehension, we cannot understand what transpires within the Holy Trinity. That the Atonement was necessary for man on account of sin both the Old and New Testaments give abundant proof, but beyond that we may not go.

The Bible opens with the springtide of Creation, life in its fullness, with death unknown, Nature a willing servant and man supreme on earth. But from the time that sin entered into the world there has been the

necessity of sacrifice. From Genesis to Revelation there runs the scarlet line of "blood shed for the remission of sins."

The first sacrifice of life for sin we find in Eden, when God gave to Adam and Eve coats of skin. From that time on God instituted one object lesson after another to foreshadow the one great sacrifice for sin. Death was the consequence of sin, and innocent death alone could atone for it. Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God because it pointed to the Atonement, and Cain's was not acceptable because it failed to teach it.

OFFERING SACRIFICE FOR SIN

Both were religious men and had received the same training, but they differed in the kind of religion they practiced. Abel's religion was one of obedience and was acceptable. Cain's was human religion, which would not stand the test. The first man born of woman had human religion, and he became a murderer.

Noah, too, realized the necessity of sacrifice for sin. When he escaped the judgment on the world for sin, his first act was to offer sacrifice to God for his own sins and the sins of his family.

The trial of Abraham's faith was, perhaps, the clearest object lesson of all the Old Testament history of the Atonement through the Messiah. God had blessed the home of Abraham and Sarah with the birth of a son, when they were both well stricken in years. For twenty-five years their hearts had yearned for the promised heir through whom the Lord would raise up a mighty nation—His chosen people.

Years had passed quickly in that home since the child Isaac had been given them, and day by day they watched him as he grew toward manhood and the realization of all their fond hopes and ambitions. With what care the aged patriarch directed the training of his son as he thought of the future before the child. Then came that strange and

mysterious command from God: "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering."

This man had learned the lesson of obedience and he did not argue with God. Early next morning you could see the little party setting out from home. No one knew the secret burden in that father's heart as he looked upon the son in whom his love and hopes were centered. But he did not waver when he recognized his Lord's command, and firmly continued along that sad and weary way.

The last night came that he was to have his son with him. There was little sleep for the old man that night, and as he looked down upon the sleeping form of Isaac there was an awful struggle in his bosom. He wondered what the meaning of this strange demand might be. He went back over his past life and remembered how God had promised that through this very son He would raise up a mighty nation whose hosts should be numberless.

"I do not now see what it means," the old man said, "but ever since He called me from my brethren He has led me safely and in obedience to His commands, He has been my 'exceeding great reward.'"

As morning broke there rose before their sight the dark outlines of Mount Moriah, the place of sacrifice, and leaving the attendants, the father and son began the ascent alone. At last the summit was reached, the altar was prepared and everything stood ready for the sacrifice.

Then the father opened up his heart to his son and revealed the command which God had given him. Probably he told the youth how God had dealt with him in the past, and now that the command had come to yield again the most precious possession of his life, he dared not refuse. It may be that there by the altar's side they knelt together and resigned themselves into the hands of Jehovah.

Then, as the father was about to obey the summons of his Lord, there came a voice from Heaven crying to spare the son. Nineteen hundred years later, upon the hill of Calvary, God spared not His only begotten Son, but gave Him up freely for us all.

ANOTHER OBJECT LESSON

The Paschal lamb was still another great object lesson of the doctrine of Atonement. (1 Corinthians 5:7) Every detail of that sacred Passover feast was performed most reverently and with the greatest care. The blood of the lamb was in no way to be treated carelessly. And as the Lord's destroying angel passed through the land of Egypt that night, it was those who were sheltered behind the blood whose homes were spared.

And when, in later years, God ordained the service of the Tabernacle, He provided that the only acceptable way of approaching Him was through the sacrificial blood. Throughout the entire Mosaic law that one great principle was repeated again and again, that purity and spotlessness were necessary for entering God's most holy presence, and that these only could be obtained through the atoning sacrifice.

These Jewish rites were but the fore-shadowing of what Christ taught in His ministry and what His apostles emphasized after Him. As the Master was taking His last journey toward Jerusalem, He told His disciples that the Son of Man was "to give His life a ransom for many," and a few days later, when seated about the Passover feast and passing to His followers the sacramental cup, He said:

"This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:28)

THE TEACHING OF THE ATONEMENT

The early writers to the churches were, perhaps, the most pronounced in their teaching of the Atonement, as they saw that if this were lacking their religion would be lifeless. Peter declares that Christ “bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.”(1 Peter 2:24)

In another place he writes, “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” (1Peter 3:18)

The same Apostle even goes so far as to call the blood of Christ “precious.” To understand why it should be so esteemed by every Christian, let us see what it does for the believer. (1 Peter 1:19)

To the Beloved Apostle on Patmos there appeared a Heavenly host singing a new song of the Lamb of God, the theme of which was, “For Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood.” The first reason why His blood is precious then is because it redeems us. In His great mercy, He has bought us, having Himself paid the price of our redemption.

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We are not only redeemed by the atoning blood, but it is the means of drawing us nearer to God and nearer to one another. This is Paul’s message to the Ephesians:

“But now in Christ Jesus, ye, who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2:13)

There is no power which so unites men as the doctrine of the Atonement. Under its influence there are no masses nor classes; nationalities are forgotten and we realize the only genuine brotherhood of man in its acceptance. I remember Dr. Kirk, of Boston, saying that when he came to Christ there was an Irishman on one side of him and a negro on the other, but beneath the shadow of the cross and under the atoning blood they became brothers in Christ.

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Paul, in his epistle to the church at Colosse, gives us the third reason for prizes the Atonement when he explains how God reconciled all things unto Himself “having made peace through the blood of His cross.” (Colossians 1:20) Through the Atonement we are no longer at enmity with God, but we have peace and communion.

We are also acquitted or justified through the death of Christ before the great tribunal of God. It is not for want of evidence, however, as we must all plead guilty in His presence, but because the penalty has been paid. For, as Paul wrote to the Romans, “Being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” (Romans 5:9)

There is also a cleansing power in His blood which purifies from sin. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin,” writes the

Apostle John. (1 John 1:7) As we go about our daily duties we do so need a power which will cleanse from the corrosive influences which threaten our Christian lives. Here we find our need supplied and here we may come for constant relief.

WE ARE MORAL COWARDS

The final reason why the doctrine of the Atonement should be precious to the believer is because it gives us boldness. We are naturally moral cowards. If we but lived up to what we know to be right, we would have a far higher life of privilege.

A story is told of a man on trial for his life. Friends at court, however, had procured a pardon for him from the king, who had commanded that on no account was the trial to be influenced by his clemency. The law was to have its full course, and in case the prisoner was condemned the pardon might be used.

When at last the jury returned a verdict of guilty the prisoner showed the utmost indifference, and when the judge pronounced sentence of death he expressed the horror they had all felt at the callous indifference which the prisoner had manifested throughout the trial. But as they were about to take the condemned man back to his cell he drew from his breast the royal pardon and walked out a free man. It was the consciousness of what he had that gave the prisoner boldness. Thus it is that we too have “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.” (Hebrews 10:19)

All that Christ left upon this earth from His mortal body was His blood. He requires an accounting from humanity, and the greatest question that can ever come to a mortal being is: What is my relation to the Atonement? The blood of Christ calls for our salvation or our

condemnation. If we seek shelter behind it, it becomes our surety; if we deny it, like the blood of Abel, it calls for our condemnation.

The greatest question that can ever come to a mortal being is: What is my relation to the Atonement?

Without the Atonement Christianity loses its vitality and becomes dead formalism. Take the Atonement from the Bible and we have a meaningless confusion of vain rites and forms. This doctrine was the one theme of the New Testament preachers; it was the burden of Paul's and Stephen's testimony. It is the living teaching of the Church today and will be while the world remains.

We know little of Heaven or of the life to come, but we do know that the song of the glorified is of Moses, "the servant of God," and "of the Lamb," that "there shall be no night there," and only those will ever enter its blessed gates whose names "are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Revelation 21:27)



READ MORE ABOUT ...

Mr. Moody illustrates the doctrine of the Atonement through powerful biblical examples—from the first sacrifice in Eden to the Lamb's Book of Life in Revelation. Study these passages to understand how God used centuries of object lessons to foreshadow Christ's ultimate sacrifice, and to discover the transforming power of the blood that reconciles us to God.

- Old Testament foreshadowing of the Atonement through:
 - Abel's sacrifice (Genesis 4:3-5)
 - Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19)
 - The Passover lamb (Exodus 12:1-13, 21-28)
 - The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:1-34)
 - Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering Messiah (Isaiah 53:1-12)
- How God's love is shown through action and is the basis for believers to love one another in
 - 1 John 4:9-11
 - 1 John 4:19
 - 1 John 3:16
- Man's need for reconciliation to God in
 - Romans 5:8-11
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17-21
 - Colossians 1:19-22
- The precious blood of Christ which brings:
 - Redemption (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19)
 - Justification (Romans 5:9)
 - Peace (Colossians 1:20)
 - Access to God (Ephesians 2:13)
 - Cleansing (1 John 1:7)
 - Boldness (Hebrews 10:19-22)

- Sacrificial offerings and what Mr. Moody calls "the scarlet line" of blood shed for remission of sins in
 - Matthew 26:28
 - Hebrews 9:22
 - Ephesians 1:7
 - Luke 22:20
 - 1 John 1:7
 - Hebrews 9:14
- Christ as the Lamb of God in
 - John 1:29, 36
 - Revelation 5:6-14
 - Revelation 13:8
 - Revelation 21:27

PERSONAL APPLICATION

"The greatest question that can ever come to a mortal being is: What is my relation to the Atonement?"

Mr. Moody has shown that the Atonement lies at "the very foundation of Christianity"—it is a truth to accept, not fully comprehend.

Use the following questions to examine your personal response to Christ's finished work and to identify areas where you need to more fully appropriate the precious benefits of His blood.

Mr. Moody writes, "The greatest question that can ever come to a mortal being is: What is my relation to the Atonement?" The blood of Christ calls for either our salvation or our condemnation. How would you answer this question today? Are you trusting fully in Christ's finished work, or are you depending on your own efforts, religious activities, or family heritage for salvation?

Moody lists six precious benefits of Christ's blood: redemption, reconciliation with God and others, peace, justification, cleansing, and boldness. Which of these do you most need to experience more deeply right now? What specific step can you take this week to more fully appropriate this benefit of the Atonement in your daily life?

God spent thousands of years teaching humanity about the Atonement through “object lessons”—from Eden’s first sacrifice to Abraham’s test to the Passover lamb. Reflect on one of these Old Testament accounts from the “Read More About” section. How does seeing it as foreshadowing Christ’s sacrifice deepen your understanding of God’s redemptive plan? What does God’s patience in preparing humanity for the Atonement reveal about His character?

Moody emphasizes that “the Atonement was a transaction which took place between God the Father and God the Son”—a mystery beyond full human understanding. Christianity is “a faith, not a theory.” Are you comfortable accepting truths you cannot fully comprehend? In what areas of your faith are you demanding complete understanding before you will trust? How can you practice humble acceptance of divine mystery?

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

The core text of this Bible study—Mr. Moody's teaching on the Atonement—was originally published in *The Ladies' Home Journal* in February 1897. As a work published over 125 years ago, Mr. Moody's original text is in the public domain and free for anyone to use. Scripture quotations are from the King James Version, also in the public domain.

ABOUT THIS TEXT

This edition faithfully preserves D.L. Moody's original teaching. We have made minimal edits for modern clarity—correcting obvious errors, updating a few archaic terms, and adjusting occasional grammatical inconsistencies—while keeping Mr. Moody's voice and meaning completely intact.

WHAT'S NEW IN THIS EDITION

This 2025 edition includes:

- Updated formatting for modern readers
- Reflection and study questions
- Organized Scripture references
- Introductory paragraphs to sections titled “Mr. Moody's Bible Verses,” “Read More About ...,” and “Personal Application”

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