

An aerial photograph of a vast mountain range. The mountains are rugged and rocky, with some peaks showing signs of snow or light-colored rock. The sky is a clear, pale blue. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is centered over the middle of the image, containing the title and subtitle in white text.

KNOWING GOD

• LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF THE TRUTH •

GUIDE BOOK 3

KNOWING GOD

• LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF THE TRUTH •

Contained in this guidebook are the last two studies for the year before Growth Groups take their Christmas break. So for these last two bible study weeks, may it be a time when you are helped and encouraged to know God better. This has been a series about biblical doctrine but it is important to remember that even when we have right doctrine we can miss out on what's central, and that is Jesus. May you grow to know Christ better that you might trust in Him, worship Him, obey Him and be on mission for Him.

Next Sunday 29 November we are looking at the topic of 'God Sacrifices, Atonement' and we have a special feature on that day. From 630pm at the Hub we are showing the movie-length documentary 'American Gospel – Christ Crucified'. This is the second in the series and some would be familiar with the first 'American Gospel' documentary which has been on Netflix. 'American Gospel – Christ Crucified' is an excellent production which explores the centrality of the cross, the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement and recent criticisms from within progressive and liberal Christianity. Come along, enjoy and be informed. If you who would like pizza dinner bring \$5.





GOD COMES

• THE INCARNATION •

What are some ways you've heard people describe who Jesus is?

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GOD COMES: THE WORD MADE FLESH

Central to the Christian faith is the belief that Jesus is both fully God and fully human: 'two natures in one person', is often how it's described. This belief holds the same significance for understanding who Jesus is as the 'one in essence and three in persons' concept holds for understanding the Trinity.

The Nicene Creed summarises this belief as follows:

*We believe... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God
begotten of his Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God,
begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;
by whom all things were made;
who for us and for our salvation
came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary
and was made man.*

Though each of the gospels, contain their own unique perspectives and interests, they promote a common witness to the God who became 'incarnate' for us and our salvation. One of the gospels, John, has a beautifully poetic way of describing the incarnation in his well known opening prologue.



Read: John 1:1-18



Discuss what this prologue in John's gospel tells us about Jesus?

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Why does it matter that Jesus existed eternally as God before he came and took on his human nature?

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How does this help us see that Jesus is fully God as well as fully man?

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Read: John 8:48-59



What did Jesus mean when he said, "Before Abraham was, I am"? How does this help us to better understand who Jesus truly is?

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GOD COMES AND FALSE TEACHING

Much like the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of the incarnation is a mind bending doctrine that can be hard to piece together at times. And it's for this reason many people, in their desire to reconcile some of the concepts, have got the doctrine spectacularly wrong. This has led to many incorrect understandings throughout history about who Jesus is. Here are some examples of these misconceptions:

The Ebionite Heresy: regarded Jesus as a 'superior prophet' and 'moral teacher' who guides us to salvation through our own obedience to the law. Liberal and Progressive Christianity, though broad in theological specifics, primarily deny Jesus as being in nature God or at least one with the Father thus reducing him to being a model 'moral teacher.'

Adoptionism: held that Jesus, though exclusively human, was adopted as God's own son at his baptism (or some other point in life). Mormonism similarly teaches that Jesus is the first of God's children to become God himself.

Subordinationism: taught that the Son was subordinate to the Father not just as the incarnate Lord but also in his essence; thus denying the unity of the Son with the Father. Jehovah's Witnesses similarly teach that Jesus was created by Jehovah as the archangel Michael before the physical world existed, and is a lesser, though mighty, god

There have been many other heresies throughout history all of which tend to do one of four things, either:

1. Deny Christ's Divinity
2. Deny Christ's Humanity
3. Confuse his two natures
4. Divide his two natures



Read: Philippians 2:5-11 & Colossians 2:8-9



How do these passages demonstrate that the above heresies are incorrect ways of understanding who Jesus is?

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Does God change because of the incarnation?

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Understanding how Jesus can 'make himself nothing' ("empty himself") and remain fully God is a tricky idea to understand. It might be helpful to think about it in this way:

Christ willingly gave up the rightful use of some of the abilities of his divine nature in order to experience fully his life now as a man. So, while he was in nature fully God, yet in order to live in nature fully as a man, he gave up the expression or exercise of some of his divine abilities.

Ware, Bruce A. *Big Truths for Young Hearts*



Read: Hebrews 2:9-18



Since the eternal Son became also a human being, he can understand the weaknesses and difficulties that we experience in life. Why should this help you trust Christ and pray to him when you go through hard times?


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GOD COMES & OUR LIFE

 How should God Incarnate (The Word made Flesh) shape our worship of Him?


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 How should God Incarnate (The Word made Flesh) shape our mission and our discipleship of others? Should Jesus' example outlined in Philippians 2 shape our thinking here?

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 How should God Incarnate (The Word made Flesh) shape how we view and treat others?

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GOD JUDGES - HELPFUL RESOURCES

VIDEO



The Bible Project - Son of Man
www.youtu.be/z6cWEcqxlI

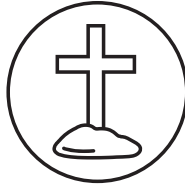
ESSAYS

10 Things You Should Know About the Incarnation

www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-incarnation

The Shocking Implications of Incarnation

www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-shocking-implications-of-incarnation



GOD SACRIFICES

• ATONEMENT •

Can you think of a time when you felt utter relief that someone stepped in to take your place? Share your story.

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Atonement refers to the needed reconciliation between sinful humankind and the holy God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ at the cross. The atonement is the climatic point that all our other theological themes have led to. God is Trinity and so there is relationship within the Godhead and to his own glory God wants relationship with those who he made. God speaks (Revelation) and the scriptures are our authority to teach and explain the meaning of the cross. God makes us (Creation) and yet we turn away from him in our rebellious hearts (God Judges). But God had a plan that was revealed throughout history to bring promised blessing and redeem a people for himself (Covenants) and that plan came to its fulfillment in the coming of His Son as the God/man Jesus (Incarnation). And Jesus willingly and in love had his mission to go to the cross for us (Atonement). Jesus said, *'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'* Mark 10:45.

We can think of atonement literally as 'at-one-ment' ie. how sinners are made one with God. Like a beautiful diamond, atonement has many facets to it eg. at the cross Christ triumphed over evil powers (Colossians 2:14-15) and at the cross Christ demonstrated sacrificial love (1 John 3:16); but at a fundamental level we must hold that it was a Penal (meaning - punishment) Substitutionary (meaning - in our place) Atonement.

THE HOLY GOD WHO BRINGS HIS WRATH

In this series we have already covered humankind's sin, but to properly understand atonement we need to set in the context of the very character of God who is holy, and personally responds with retributive justice/holy wrath towards human kind's fragrant rebellion and failure to glorify Him. Sin is so horrible it warrants punishment.



Read: Romans 2:5; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9



Talk about the pictures of God's character and justice that we're given. You can also express any struggles you might have about God's wrath if that is the case.

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ATONEMENT AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

When you look through the Old Testament an unmistakable feature is the need for sacrifices for people to obtain forgiveness for their sins. The animals functioned as a substitute for the person and this is very much evident on occasions like the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). Atonement is through the shedding of blood and the animals take the penalty the person deserved. In the later history of Israel an incredible promise is given that there will be servant of the Lord who will act like one of the animal sacrifices and die in the place of sinners.

*⁴ Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.*

*⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.*

*⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.....*

¹⁰ Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,

and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

¹¹ After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sin of many... **Isaiah 53:4-12**

ATONEMENT AND JESUS



Read: Romans 3:25-26



The context for this passage is that the apostle Paul is explaining that right relationship with God cannot be found through keeping the law but only through faith. But how does this passage provide the answer for how God who is holy and just can also simply pardon sinners?

Note: Most English translations have 'atoning sacrifice' in verse 25, but it can also be translated '*propitiation*' which is the more technical word for God's wrath being satisfied.



Read: 2 Corinthians 5:21 and 1 Peter 2:23-25 & 3:18



What takes place in Jesus and us through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross?

GOD SACRIFICES AND FALSE TEACHING

There are range of recent church leaders who criticise Penal Substitutionary Atonement. They criticise it for being a 'made-up' doctrine that was distorted by the Reformers. They criticise it for being barbaric, as if we have an angry tribal god who needs a blood sacrifice to appease his wrath. And the often-heard claim is that Penal Substitutionary Atonement is a form of 'cosmic child abuse'. In directly addressing these criticisms you might like to look at the Helpful Resources section over the page. Also, we are holding a viewing of 'American Gospel: Christ Crucified' on Sunday 29 November 630pm at the Hub. This is an excellent documentary that looks at the truth of Penal Substitutionary Atonement and its criticisms from within progressive and liberal Christian teaching. If you missed the viewing but would like to watch it, let your growth group leader know and we can look to organise a viewing at another time.



How should the truth of God who Sacrifices shape our worship of Him?

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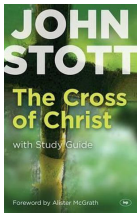


How should the truth of God who Sacrifices shape our mission and discipleship of others?

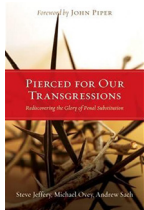
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GOD IMAGES - HELPFUL RESOURCES

BOOKS



The Cross of Christ
John Stott



Pierced for our Transgressions
Steve Jeffrey, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach

ARTICLES

3 Reasons I Changed my Mind about Penal Substitution
www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/3-reasons-changed-mind-penal-substitution

Answering 4 Common Objections to Penal Substitutionary Atonement
www.gmarks.org/article/answering-4-common-objections-to-psa

Substitutionary Atonement
www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/substitutionary-atonement

THE WEEKS TO COME

Even though there are no more growth group bible studies, our 'Knowing God' Sunday preaching series continues for a couple more weeks. Next Sunday 6 December we are looking at 'God Wins – Resurrection' and as part of the day we will be doing two things. Firstly, sharing in the Lord's Supper together. And secondly, inviting church to recite the words of the Nicene Creed as an expression of our faith in God and our belonging to historical Christianity.

THE NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified. He spoke through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to life in the world to come. Amen.



CHRIST CENTRAL
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH