

Beliefs: What does the Anglican Church teach about salvation?

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There is nothing that the Anglican Church teaches about salvation that is different from the teaching of other major churches such as the Catholic, Orthodox, Methodist or Baptist Churches. Unlike the Catholic Church though, Anglicans are not obliged to regularly confess their sins individually to a priest, though some choose to do so.

Salvation comes from Jesus – indeed the name Jesus means saviour, that is, one who saves (Matthew 1: 21), so Anglicans believe that Jesus was born into the world to be our saviour. At the heart of this salvation is the forgiveness of our sins - sin meaning the things that we think, say or do (consciously or unconsciously) that are wrong, and which cause a barrier between us and God. Anglicans believe that through Jesus' death on the cross, Jesus brings our forgiveness from all those sins and it saves us from the judgement of God. Salvation brings eternal life, which means that in this world we can experience inner peace from knowing we have been put right with God, and that we will be in God's presence after death. Hence the word salvation can be used in the past sense – Jesus has saved us from our sins, and the future sense - Jesus will save us from being judged (at the time of our death or at the end of time) and found guilty of sin.

Salvation, however, is wider than this, as the word for 'salvation' that we find in the New Testament means wholeness or healing. There many Gospel accounts of Jesus' healing of ill people and of his feeding the hungry, which are described using the words 'saved' or 'salvation'. Hence many Anglicans would see human work to advance medicine and to eradicate world poverty as contributing to God's work of salvation in the world. For many Anglicans this would include restoration of the environment following St Paul's words about the need for all of creation 'to be set free from its bondage to decay' (Romans 8:23).

Atonement means being 'at one' with God, and there are various theories of atonement, which use particular verses of the Bible, or the teaching of Christian teachers down through the past twenty centuries, to try to explain how Jesus' death puts us at one with God. These theories include the penal substitution theory (a penalty was needed to be paid for human sin, and to turn away God's wrath, which Jesus paid by his agonising death on the cross e.g. Romans 3: 23 - 26), the ransom theory (that Jesus paid the price to liberate humans from slavery to sin and – some believe – to the devil e.g. Mark 10: 45), and what is called the moral or example theory (Jesus death shows us how much God loves us and shows us how we should live e.g. 1 John 4: 10, 11). However, many Anglicans would not feel the need to have a man-made theory to explain how Jesus saves us, believing that God is far beyond our human understanding.