

Propitiation and the Changed Mind **Rom. 3:21-26; 1 John 1:5-2:2**

Introduction:

Let us continue the thoughts of recent sermons regarding the ‘transformation of the mind’ (Rom. 12:2), and recognize that the most complete transformation of any human mind is the initial ‘change’ that is required for salvation – i.e., repentance.

See Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30. ‘repentance’ is the Greek *metano’eo* (“to change the mind”). With faith, it is a primary condition for salvation.

One of the great advantages of repentance is that it allows the human mind to perceive personally (through the Holy Spirit) certain things that God has always known:

- the dreadfulness of sin and its affect on the human life;
- the pervasiveness of sin, even in the life of a believer;
- the continuing availability of repentance and forgiveness in a believer’s life;
- the power and grandeur of God’s solution to the problem of sin.

Which brings us to the topic of propitiation (from the Latin ‘propitiare’: “to appease, to satisfy fully a debt by payment”). It was formerly used in a pagan context, but was taken into the early English Bible translations as a word that uniquely expressed all of the ramifications of God’s actions towards man in the act of forgiveness of sin. It is often translated as “atonement” or “atoning sacrifice” in recent versions (cf. NIV).

1. Defining ‘propitiation’.

- In the OT context, it is the act of appeasement, by which the righteous sentence of the Law has been executed and God’s judgement-seat is changed into His mercy-seat.
- In the NT context, it is the means of that appeasement in which Jesus Christ has satisfied completely, by His voluntary death on the cross, the just (righteous) demands of His Father for the execution of His wrath and anger on the sins of mankind.

Summary: Propitiation is directly related to the satisfaction of God’s just anger (“wrath”) against man’s unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18; 5:9; Eph. 5:6). God’s holiness can neither tolerate nor excuse sin, and therefore sin must be judged in the sinner through God’s wrath upon sin. Replacing the righteousness of Jesus Christ for the sinfulness of man provides a perfect ‘penal substitutionary atonement’ for the penitent believer.

In other words, “there is within God a dichotomy of love and anger, but through propitiation love triumphs over anger, abolishing it. The doctrine of propitiation is precisely that God loved the objects of His wrath so much that He gave His Own son to the end that He by His blood should make provision for the removal of His wrath” (John Murray, *The Atonement*).

2. Defending ‘propitiation’.

- Critics of penal substitutionary atonement state that seeing the Atonement as appeasing God is a pagan idea that makes God seem tyrannical, to which J.I. Packer (“Knowing God”) responds with a distinct difference between pagan and Christian propitiation: "In paganism, man propitiates his gods, and religion becomes a form of commercialism and, indeed, of bribery. In Christianity, however, God propitiates his wrath by his own action. He set forth Jesus Christ ... to be the propitiation of our sins."
- Further, propitiation is far more than mere ‘expiation’, as suggested by some recent translations. Expiation is an action for covering or hiding man’s sin, thereby eliminating an impediment to fellowship with God; propitiation, by contrast, is all of this plus the satisfaction and pacifying of the wrath of God.

3. Describing 'propitiation'.

In the NT, 'propitiation' occurs 6 times, based on the root '*hilask...*'.

- Twice as a verb (*hilaskomai*: 'to substitute just wrath with granted forgiveness') – see Lk. 18:13; Heb. 2:17.
- Twice as a related noun (*hilastayrion*: 'the place of propitiation; where God meets with man for the exercise of gracious forgiveness') - see Heb. 9:1-5; Rom. 3:21-26.
- Twice as a noun (*hilasmos*: 'the offering that allows God to exercise His justice in satisfying His wrath on a substitute, rather than on the believing sinner') – see 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10.

- **To propitiate: the action of propitiation.**

- Lk. 18:13: the plea of a sinful man to a righteous God. Observe:
 - o The characteristics of the penitent sinner:
 - repentance
 - recognition of his inability to meet the demands of a righteous God
 - faith that God would act to substitute for his sin and to remove the threat of punishment.
 - o The result: "justified" (a perfect passive participle: 'having been made righteous', with the sense of continuing righteousness).
- Heb. 2:17: the link to the OT. Jesus is depicted as a faithful/merciful High Priest so that He could fulfill one of the High Priest's primary functions – to make offerings to God on behalf of sinful men so that God could forgive sin, based on the full satisfaction of His just wrath. See the ritual in Lev. 16.

- **The mercy-seat: the location of propitiation.**

- Heb. 9:1-5: note the detail associated with the Holy of Holies, and the ultimate point of the 'mercy-seat' (cf. Lev. 16:12-14; NASB Mgn.: 'propitiatory'), where God met with man (Ex. 25:22).
- Rom. 3:21-26: the statement of how God provides propitiation, and its affect.

How is the sinner of Lk. 18 made righteous?

- o 3:21: "apart from the Law"
- o 3:22: "through faith in Jesus Christ"
- o 3:22: "for all those who believe"
- o 3:24: "as a gift by His grace"
- o 3:24: "through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus"
- o 3:25: "as a 'mercy-seat' (propitiation) in His blood"
- o 3:25: "through faith"

What is the reason for this "public display" (3:25-26)?

- o To "demonstrate God's righteousness"
- o To show "the forbearance of God" in "passing over" sins
- o To demonstrate that "He would be just"
- o To demonstrate that He would be "the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"

- **The propitiation: the One Who is the living propitiator.**

- 1 Jn. 1:5-2:2: John concentrates in this passage on the fact of sin, admission of sin, confession and repentance. He then introduces the solution to the sin problem – 'Jesus Christ ... Himself'. The propitiation that Jesus provides is:
 - o Single and unique – "an advocate"
 - o Continuous – "we have ... He is ..."
 - o Effective and complete – "our sins ... those of the whole world" (based on repentance and faith).
- 1 Jn. 4:10: the reinforcement of 2:2, with the basis of God's action. Observe:
 - o Propitiation is the action of God toward man.
 - o Propitiation is provided despite man's resistance or ignorance.

"Propitiation does not make God gracious...God does not love us because Christ died for us, Christ died for us because God loves us" (John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p 174).

Conclusion: Observe the three aspects that are presented in the NT with regard to propitiation, and allow your mind to be transformed with these concepts. Jesus Christ, God's Son, is:

- The fulfillment of the type of the OT High-Priest. He alone is truly able to enter the holy of Holies (the presence of the Godhead) with blood that is His own (Heb. 9:23-29).
- The fulfillment of the type of the mercy-seat. He is our Advocate (1 Jn. 2:1) Who sits in judgement on sinful mankind and Who also receives and forgives those who come to Him through the efficacy of His blood, claiming mercy and His activity as propitiator on their behalf.
- The sole and only efficacious offering. All OT offerings were made in anticipation of His perfect, sinless, and complete offering (Heb. 9:11-14; 10:11-18), which now stands as the perfect sacrifice.