

## Propitiation

1 John 2:1-10

The concept of god universally held by all the heathen is of a god who is angry and that anger must be soothed before any blessing can be expected from him. And all heathen religions seek to change the attitude of their god toward man so that they may receive kindnesses and mercies from his hands. It is only in the Word of God that we have pictured for us the true character of God – a God of *love*, a God of *mercy*, a God of *grace*, a God who, even though He must punish sinners because He is a holy God, *loves* sinners and seeks to pour forth *mercy* and *grace* to them.

In 1 Kings 18 we have pictured so graphically that which is the heathen concept of a god – a god who needs to be propitiated, who needs to have his attitude toward men completely changed so that they may gain some favor from him. You will remember that Elijah, in order to reveal the true challenged to prophets of Baal. Verses 25-26 tell us, “Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for you are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us.” These prophets of a false god were trying to change their god’s attitude toward them by prayer and supplication. But verse 26 tells us that as a result, “...there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped on the altar which they made.” Through their outward demonstrations they were seeking to change the attitude of their god from animosity and hatred to kindness and mercy. Verse 27 says, “And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud; for he is a god, either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he is sleeping, and must be awakened.” Elijah was voicing the heathen concept that a god was indifferent to the need of men, and that it took some great work on the part of man to arouse any interest, or compassion, or concern for men. Verse 28 says, “...they cried aloud and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them.” Through personal sacrifice, suffering, and penance they were seeking to change the attitude of their god and turn his stony silence so as to receive some mercy from him.

In contrast, Elijah came before his God, not with prayers, not with outward demonstrations, not with constant crying, not with penance, which he himself offered, but with a sacrifice. In simple faith he offered up a lamb to God. God heard, and God answered Elijah.

It is an unfortunate thing, but even today, many people have the common misconception that God is hard, cold, stubborn, disinterested, and unconcerned; and that it is only through prayers, through penance, and through personal sacrifice that His attitude toward sinners can be changed. But when we turn to the Word of God, we find that God and revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ, contrary to the world's concept, is a God of infinite love, of infinite mercy, of infinite grace, and is a God who is concerned with the needs of His creatures. And, in that same light, we find that He is a God who delights to pour out His love and mercy on each of us.

Therefore, when we come to the biblical teaching on propitiation, we will once more see the awesome value of the death of Christ for sinners. When we studied the doctrine of *redemption*, we saw that redemption was the *sin-ward* aspect of the death of Christ in which Christ, by His death, purchased out of the slave market of sin those who were shackled and bound. When we studied the doctrine of *reconciliation*, we saw that reconciliation was the *man-ward* aspect of the death of Christ. Sinners who were separated from God by a great gulf have not been brought near. Tonight, we come to consider this doctrine of *propitiation*; we are studying the *God-ward* aspect of the value of the death of Christ.

Propitiation does not suggest that God needs to be changed, for our God is an unchanging God. The Father, no less than the Son, as seen in Hebrews 13:8 “is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” When John wrote, “God is love,” he was not suggesting that God had begun to love after Jesus Christ had died for the sins of the world, but rather that love, eternally and infinitely, was a God of love. But the love of God for sinners could not be unloosed, could not be poured out on them until there was some basis on which God might deal with men. And propitiation is the work of Christ that satisfies all the claims of divine holiness, righteousness, and justice, so that God is free to act on behalf of sinners. Remember, propitiation does not change the mind of God; but propitiation simply frees God to work on behalf of sinners.

In the Old Testament we have portrayed for us in type the value of the death of Christ as that which propitiates, or releases God love and mercy towards sinners. This propitiation is described for us in Leviticus 16, where we have God's revelation concerning the Day of Atonement. There are several facts about the ritual of the Day of Atonement that we need to examine.

God spoke to Moses in Leviticus 16:2, “Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not; for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.” **The first fact that we discover is that a holy God is unapproachable because of the sinfulness of man.** Moses and Aaron were not permitted to come into the presence of God except through the blood of sacrifice, and then only when followed a prescribed ritual. God entered the outer veil and the inner veil in the Tabernacle to remind the nation Israel, and to remind us, that while God is a God of infinite love, mercy, and grace, the barrier of sin separated God from man, so that man in his sin cannot come to God.

In Leviticus 16:16-17, concerning the sprinkling of the blood, we read, “... he shall make an atonement (or a covering) for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins; and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness. And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place...” **We discover from these verses that atonement, or propitiation, was necessary because of the sinfulness of the nation as represented by the priests.** These verses reveal the first great fact that propitiation is necessary because God is a holy God and men are sinners. Men need to be reconciled to God; God does not need to be reconciled to men. **God needs only to have a basis on which He may receive sinners. Propitiation provides that basis.**

Verse 14 tells us that it is the blood that does the work of propitiation, “...he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.” **It was not the incense that propitiated. It was not the offering of gold or silver that propitiated.** It was not the prayers offered by the priest for forgiveness of the people of Israel that propitiated. **It was not good works that propitiated.** But it was the blood that propitiated.

**God appointed the place where the blood of propitiation was to be applied.** The place of propitiation was the Mercy Seat above the Ark. **Within the Ark was the Law that had been broken. God commanded the blood to be applied to the Mercy Seat so that the God who must be propitiated could look upon the broken Law contained in the Ark and He could be merciful to men.** After the blood was applied and God was propitiated, God warded off judgment upon the sins of the nation of Israel for another twelve-month period. The writer of Hebrews tell us (10:3) that each year when the high priest sprinkled the blood which propitiated upon the Mercy Seat, the place of

propitiation, there was a remembrance made again of sin. **Each time the sacrifice was offered and the blood of propitiation was applied, it was a recognition of obligation.** The child of Israel were renewing an indebtedness, and each year on the Day of Atonement they offered the *blood* in order that the note might be deferred, for the writer of Hebrews tell us that it was “impossible that the blood of bulls and goats could finally take away sin.”

Romans 3:25 tells us all this anticipated the Lord Jesus Christ, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” **Paul is simply telling us that when Jesus went to the cross, He gathered together all those notes of indebtedness which the nation of Israel had renewed every year on the Day of Atonement, and He, by the offering up of His blood as that which propitiated a holy God, made a final and complete settlement for all of those notes.** As a result there was remission, there was forgiveness of sins that are past.

**From the Old Testament, then, we discover the basic facts that God is the One who must be propitiated.** God needs to be propitiated because of the sins of man, and it is only *blood* that can propitiate. God has appointed a place of propitiation, and when the propitiating blood is applied at the place of propitiation. **God is rendered propitious, and God can manifest His grace and His mercy and His love because He has found a way whereby He can let all His love and mercy pour forth to a sinner.** Yet, the propitiation provided in the Old Testament was *temporary*.

**When we come over to the New Testament we find that the same basic truths that the Old Testament presented in the ritual of the Day of Atonement are finally and completely fulfilled by Christ.** Hebrews 9:28 says that propitiation was offered to God because men were sinners, “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many...” 1 Peter 2:24 tells us that when Jesus Christ went to the cross, He bore “our sins in his own body on the tree.” The Prophet Isaiah, anticipating the ministry of Christ, said in Isaiah 53:6, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” **It was sin that sent Christ to Calvary.** Just as it was sin in the nation Israel that caused an *animal* to be offered on the Day of Atonement, so it was sin in the human race that caused *Christ* to be offered as a sacrifice on the cross.

**We discover, in the second place, that when Christ went to offer Himself as the sacrifice for sins, the One who whom He offered Himself was God.**

Hebrews 9:13-14 says, “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” In other words, Christ recognized the fact that God the Father had within Him a well of mercy and grace to dispense to men in their misery and need, but that mercy could not be poured forth until a basis had been found from which God could be just and yet the Justifier of men.

**We find, in the third place, that Christ offered to God that which could make a propitiation.** Hebrews 9:14 says, “How much more shall the blood of Christ...purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” That which propitiated was *His own blood*. Hebrews 9:22 says, “...almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.” **Because there was no propitiation, no forgiveness, no reconciliation apart from the shedding of blood, Christ offered His blood as that which would propitiate God, so that God though the blood of Christ might have a basis upon which He could extend His hand to sinners and invite them to Himself through His Son who made propitiation for them.** With that thought in mind, John says, “... he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” And in 1 John 4:10 he says, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

**Last of all, we discover it was the body of Christ that became the place of propitiation.** The *Mercy Seat* was the place where the blood was sprinkled in the Old Testament, but at Calvary the *body of Christ*, who hung on the cross, because the *place* where propitiation was made. Peter referred to this fact in 1 Peter 2:24 when he said, “Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.” Notice the phrase, “in his own body.” **When Christ went to Calvary’s cross, He went there to pour out His life’s blood. He was offering a propitiatory sacrifice to God.** His blood was that which propitiated, and His body, offered on the cross, was the place where that propitiation was made. He, in effect, was saying to the Father, “I ma what the Mercy Seat was in Israel. My body is the place where all of the broken Law is gathered together, and where all of the indebtedness is accumulated. My body is the place where propitiation will be made.” Then He poured out His blood as propitiatory sacrifice to God, and He lifted His voice and prayed, “Father, forgive them.” **He recognized that God was the One who needed to be propitiated.** He offered His blood to God so that there might be a basis upon which God could remove judgment for all who come to God through Jesus Christ.

And that is the doctrine of propitiation.