

Romans

Bible Study

Propitiation

Romans 3:25

We are continuing to study biblical terms relevant to our salvation. So far, we've studied justification and righteousness. We are declared righteous when God justifies us when we believe in Him fully for our salvation. We also looked at the word imputation. This is the act of God ascribing righteousness unto us. We are not righteous in and of ourselves, and we will never be righteous, but we have been declared righteous. Psalm 145:17 says that the Lord is righteous in all his ways. This means that everything He does is right and perfect. God is our standard for what righteousness is.

In contrast to God, we are all unrighteous and we will remain in that state. Romans 3:10 makes that very clear. However, when we are saved, God justifies us, declaring us righteous. He credits righteousness to our account. Since we are "in Christ," when God looks at us, He sees us through Christ. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Christ was made sin, even though He is not a sinner, so that we would be made righteous, even though we are not righteous. Sin was imputed to Christ, and righteousness was imputed to the believer.

All of this was made possible by Christ's redemptive work on the cross. Believers have redemption through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). Christ bought us, as slaves to sin, out of the marketplace of sin, so to speak. We are no longer slaves to sin, but of righteousness (Romans 6:6, 17—18).

Satisfying God

Although propitiation is a somewhat obscure word, it is an important word in the realm of our salvation. To propitiate means to appease, or satisfy. According to Romans 2:5, unbelievers are storing up wrath in the day of wrath (see also Ephesians 5:6). God cannot overlook the injustice of our sin. A wrathful God is a righteous God since a god who allows unrighteousness would be unrighteous himself (Romans 3:5). Those who reject God's offer of eternal life are really deciding that they would rather have His wrath directed to them. Every person is in control of their eternal destiny by either accepting or rejecting God's gracious gift (Romans 2:4). What kind of God would allow sin and unrighteousness into heaven? Those who have rejected God all their lives will not want to be with Him for all eternity.

Since God's wrath is being shown to the world (Romans 1:18), we need to find a way to appease or, more technically correct, to satisfy Him. His wrath is upon us because we are steeped in sin and unrighteousness, with our only desire to please ourselves. Unfortunately, we are unable to satisfy God's wrath because we are unable to pay the price of our sins. Fortunately, God made it possible through Jesus Christ, as the perfect human, free of sin. He was made sin for us that we might be made righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ paid the price of sin, the shedding of blood (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:22). This payment appeased or satisfied God, and allowed us to come to God through Jesus Christ. This payment, Christ's death, was a propitiation to satisfy God's wrath against sinners. Christ was the propitiation (The payment that satisfied God) and God was thus propitiated.

Our previous lesson defined the word *redemption*. Redemption has man in view. We were in need of redemption and that was accomplished through Christ's shed blood. Propitiation has God the Father in view. Propitiation was the payment that satisfied God's wrath against sinful men. Again, it was Christ's work on the cross that accomplished the satisfaction of God's wrath.

Interestingly, the Greek word for propitiation is translated as mercy seat in Hebrew 9:5. You may recall that the mercy seat was located inside the holy-of-holies within the temple. This was in the innermost sanctum where the High Priest was allowed to enter only once every year, to atone for the sins of the people. The mercy seat was the cover for the ark of the covenant, which contained the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, Aaron's budding rod and the jar of manna. It was the symbol of God's presence. It is significant that the mercy seat covered the ark of the covenant, containing the Ten Commandments. It was impossible for anyone to perfectly keep the Law, but the shortcomings of the people were covered by the symbol of God's mercy, the mercy seat. The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the mercy seat to appease God's wrath against the people. It was necessary for blood to be shed, for without the shedding of blood there was no remission sin (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22).

Atonement was made for the sins of the people when they brought a sacrifice, as they were told to do in the Mosaic Law. An atonement is literally a covering. The word translated as atonement is also the same word used of the covering of the ark (Genesis 6:14). An atonement for sins was merely a covering for sins (Psalm 32:1; 85:2) These covered sins were overlooked by God until Jesus Christ came to die on the cross and finally deal with these sins of the past (Romans 3:25). God would overlook these sins as long as the proper sacrifice was offered up to God, the shedding of the blood of an animal. God was propitiated when these sacrifices were given as prescribed in the Old Testament. However, it was necessary to continually sacrifice animals because the people continually sinned, and the sacrifices were inadequate and the effects were short-lived

After Christ's sacrificial death, the sins of the past were forever dealt with because He was the perfect, everlasting sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 10:11—14). The human priests were not capable of offering a sacrifice that would have eternal results because they were patterned after Adam, and therefore were cursed by the sin nature. Christ, on the other hand, was perfectly suited to perform this task because He was not encumbered with the Adamic nature. He could carry the sins of mankind and endure having God the Father turn away from Him, as if He were a sinner, breaking communication with Him for the first time.

An evil doctrine?

There are many who struggle with the idea of God being satisfied by having His Son shed His blood and die on the cross. On a human level, they can't imagine a father being okay with not only putting his son to death, but seemingly being pleased with it. People think it makes God look like an angry monster who can be sated by seeing His Son suffering. Most people find it hard to understand that a loving God can also be a God of wrath. Love and wrath are not opposites or contradictory. The same people argue that a God of love would not send anyone to the Lake of Fire for all eternity because God is a God of love

Perhaps the question that should be asked is, would God show His love toward a person whom He knew would reject Him his entire life? The answer is, of course, yes, absolutely. God demonstrated His love to all mankind by sending His Son to die for the sins of the world (Romans 5:6—8). Jesus Christ died for the whole vile and sinful human race. No other demonstration of God's great love is necessary. The entire human race has been given the opportunity to come to God so that there is absolutely no excuse for those who decide to reject God's free offer of salvation. A just and righteous God has no other choice but to acknowledge their decision of rejection, and set them apart from Him for all eternity. People generally do not accept the idea of God's wrath because they truly don't understand God (they don't study Scripture) and they approach Him from an emotional, humanistic viewpoint. People often attribute to God their own limited and distorted understanding of what human love is, and in so doing, bring God down to their level.

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