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Propitiation - Part 2

Introduction

As with every Biblical doctrine, consideration must be given to four directional arrows:

- a) The immediate context; why do the apostles speak of “propitiation” in these passages and “justification”, “redemption”, etc.?
- b) How the subject is viewed in relevant passages. When considering “propitiation” it occurs in the following verses (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10).
- c) The meaning of the Greek words which help direct how the ancients understood what was being meant. This will be considered in this paper.
- d) If it is a follow-up word from the Old Testament, how was it used in the Old Testament?

Meaning of The Greek Words

There are three Greek words but all are translated by the two English words, “propitiation” and “reconciliation”. Those three words are:

- a) “**Hilastērion**” indicates the place of propitiation in the Old Testament, the lid of the ark in the Tabernacle, the place where the sin bearing of the sacrifice (expiation) was satisfactory to the government of God and therefore propitiation is enjoyed.
- b) “**Hilaskomai**” is a verb and occurs in Hebrews 2:17, “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.
- c) “**Hilamos**” indicates the Propitiator who provided the appeasement needed due to our sin. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10). It is perhaps (due to context) better “Expiator”, that is the Remover of our sins penalty.

The Contrast Between “Atonement and Propitiation”

Propitiation focuses on God’s justice. I say “God’s” because it is always undeviatingly and incredibly righteous, totally unlike the “justice” of the nations.

- a) Our enmity against God, insolence and iniquities, means that we are sinful criminals rebelling against the principles of God’s character. The result is that while in that heart and mind attitude, God gives His verdict. “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Rom. 2:5).
- b) It is not that God is displeased at man’s rebellion, He is positively angry, “God is angry with the wicked every day” (Psa. 7:11). I have one son and I would be furious if anyone mocked, spat on him or deliberately hurt him in any way. I love him (as with my daughters) and if anyone did my children, their spouses, or my grandchildren harm, would I not have the right to be angry? When man mocks the offer of God’s salvation, spits in His Son’s face, slaps Him with their hands, and in hatred cries, “Crucify Him” (Mk. 15:13). Does God have the right to be angry? The question then becomes, “How can that righteous anger be averted and one start anew with all execution of judgment for the past rebellion cancelled?”
- c) For one who would damage my children, how could they satisfy my anger, or bring them back into full friendship with me? Damage would be done which is unrepairable. How does God then cancel out the damage I, as a sinner, have done? He cannot just ignore my rebellion and cancel my just punishment. On the other hand, it would not be right to punish an innocent person for my sinfulness. What was God to do? The only way it is righteousness is if the innocent volunteered to take the punishment for me, and in my place receive the execution of the judgment of the court.

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I recall a hymn we used to sing:

Wonderful love that rescued me, sunk deep in sin,
Guilty and vile as I could be, no hope within;
When ev'ry ray of light had fled, O glorious day!
Raising my soul from out the dead, Love found a way.

Refrain:

*Love found a way to redeem my soul,
Love found a way that could make me whole;
Love sent my Lord to the cross of shame,
Love found a way, O praise His holy name!*

Love bro't my Saviour here to die on Calvary,
For such a sinful wretch as I, how can it be?
Love bridged the gulf 'twixt me and Heav'n, taught me to pray;
I am redeemed, set free, forgiv'n, love found a way.

Avis B. Christiansen

God is the God of infinite love and before that love could be fully manifested there had to be a way for His righteous justice to be executed. Christ stood in the gap between the individual and God, and God executed His judgment my sins deserved on Christ. Holding nothing back, the rod of divine wrath was executed on Christ. He became the cursed for me and suffered the full penalty for my sins to the entire satisfaction of God. God who has been slighted and offended must be satisfied with the method and fulness of the execution of justice. He demonstrated that satisfaction by two major events:

- a) He raised Him from the dead and
- b) Christ was exalted by God and to God and is at the right Hand of God

The Main Focus of Propitiation

While we delight with joy and adoration in Christ because of His sacrifice on the cross and because He saves us from God's wrath, there is a tendency to think only of Christ's work as being solely for our benefit, when the ultimate benefit was to bring glory to the holy and just God who was glorified in the work of Christ (Jn. 17). The principle reason for Christ's death is God-ward, meaning the most important aspect is God's benefit as it provides a means by which He can turn his wrath away from His creation, and in particular His people, and whereby He can exercise His true character of love. In relation to people, propitiation stems from His love for us (1 Jn. 4:10).

Blessed Results of Propitiation

Because the Lord, by more than sufficiently meeting the requirements of the Holy God and being personally fully qualified and willing to righteously bear the full penalty for our sins, God's justice is satisfied, He is propitiated. This is fundamental for if the offended God is not satisfied with the execution of divine justice, then there will be no further blessings, consequently justification etc., are meaningless terms and empty phrases. Thank God and praise His glorious name God is satisfied, and by His expiating work being satisfactory to God we have:

- a) Ratification of the New Covenant (Matt. 26:28)
- b) Justification (Rom. 5:9)
- c) Redemption (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14)
- d) Forgiveness (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14)
- e) Peace with God (Col. 1:20)
- f) Purification (Heb. 9:14)
- g) An entrance into the holiest (Heb. 10:19)
- h) We are a purchased possession (Acts 20:28)

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In closing, I can think of no better way than to quote the words of the old writings which said:

Such was the sacrifice He made the law could ask no more,
For not a mite was left unpaid when He my judgment bore.

Guilty I stand before Thy face;
On me I feel Thy wrath abide:
'Tis just the sentence should take place,
'Tis just—but O, Thy Son hath died!

For me I now believe He died!
He made my every crime His own,
Fully for me He satisfied:
Father, well pleased behold Thy Son.

. . . . *Rowan Jennings*