

# The Doctrine of Propitiation

## Introduction

“Propitiation” is one of those words describing the universality of the unbroken perfections of the Lord which is granted to the believer through Christ, our “Propitiation” (1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10). In ancient times this was a common word but the Holy Spirit took it and gave it a new and spiritual significance.

## The distinction between the meaning of the words and usage in the scriptures

When God planned salvation He considered every level of man’s situation and then fully met it through the sufferings of Christ on the cross.

- a) As guilty sinners man needed justification and this could only be supplied by one who never needed justification, not a crime could be laid to His charge.
- b) As an enemy I needed reconciliation and this could only be supplied by one who never needed reconciliation but lived every moment of every day in fulness of fellowship and harmony with God.
- c) As a sinner I needed forgiveness and this could only be supplied by one who never needed forgiveness but lived every moment of every day without an iota contrary to God.
- d) As an individual who is constantly sinning I needed propitiation and this could only be supplied by one who never needed propitiation for He was always, in Himself, perfect before God.

## There are at least three ways to understand some of the Biblical Doctrines

1) By what the word meant in the ancient culture:

- a) To the ancient peoples, propitiation indicated a god who needed to be appeased so as to have his wrath removed and favour restored. In contrast to the heathen gods which man had to appease or propitiate, God Himself did the work of executing His judgment for our sins. His justice being executed, He is able in righteousness to be merciful to the sinner (Rom. 2:5; 4:13). The great distinction between how God is appeased and man’s gods are appeased is man has to initiate the appeasement, whereas when it is God, He initiates the appeasement.
- b) Some would object to the fact that God must be appeased. There can be no mistaking the facts that:
  - i) God is love (1 Jn. 4:8)
  - ii) God does get angry with rebellious man (Psa. 7:11) and must righteously punish the sinner, thereby showing the value He puts on His righteousness. The executed judgment of God on the sinner is not uncontrolled fury but carefully measured judgment depending on:
    1. Their response to the knowledge and blessings the individual had. (Rom. 2:4)
    2. Is according to truth. (Rom. 2:2)
    3. The rebelliousness of the individual to revealed truth. (Rom. 2:5)
    4. According to their deeds. (Rom. 2:6)
    5. Not based on favour. (Rom. 2:11)
    6. According to my gospel. (Rom. 2:16)
  - iii) God does not just forgive, forgiveness is based on justice executed. (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14)
  - iv) Love and the execution of justice can both exist in an individual. In Fiji I stayed with a family, the father was the principle in the school his son attended. In the school there were certain rules, which if the son broke, he had to receive the same discipline as other children. Did that mean the father did not love him? He loved him as a father but must discipline the son as a rebellious student. Thus, judgment and love are not contrary, but a God who is all love, ignoring justice, degrades love and sovereignty.

2) By its etymology and New Testament usage:

- a) This word is never used in the Old Testament, but somewhat of its truth is indicated in the root word for “Mercy Seat”. This clause, “Mercy Seat”, is the single Hebrew word, “kapporeth” which is from the root word “Kapar”, which is translated “atonement” (71 times); “purge” (7 times); “reconciliation” (4 times); and various other associated words.

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- b) The Greek word “hilaskamoi”, and its truth, is used of the publican when he prayed: “be merciful” (Lk. 18:13) and translated “reconciliation” (Heb. 2:17). It is written of Christ that He is “a propitiation” (Rom. 3:25). Another Greek word is “hilasmos”, and used of the Lord when He is called “the propitiation” (1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10).
- 3) By how the Holy Spirit uses it in the contexts of the Scriptures.
- a) There are two articles of furniture connected with the Tabernacle which are called “hilastērion”; “mercy seat” (Heb. 9:5); and the brazen altar (Ezek. 43:14).
- b) The Mercy Seat was the lid with the cherubim for the Ark of the covenant. The word “hilastērion” has several meanings, one is to cover, so that the Mercy Seat covered that which was inside the ark, it signifies a covering. The question is, “a covering for what?” Inside the Ark were three articles: bread (Ex. 16:4); the rod of Aaron that budded (Num. 17:1-13); and the book of the law (Duet. 31:26). Each answered to a sin of the people, the bread indicated the sin of dissatisfaction with God’s provision (Ex. 16:1-2); the rod was the sin of rebellion by Korah and his associates (Num. 16:1-2); and the book of the law with the sin of disobedience (2 Kgs. 18:12; Jer. 11:8; 43:7). Before the law there was sin, but after the law was given it was transgression (Rom. 4:15; Heb. 2:2; 1 Jn. 3:4). However, despite their persistent sinning while in the wilderness and in the land, the Mercy Seat was there (Ezek. 20:18-21; 28-31).
- c) How could God dwell among such a rebellious people even when they provoked Him to anger and came under His discipline? It was because there was a Mercy Seat.
- d) I say it was always there **UNTIL** such was the grievousness of their sin, then the Ark and the Mercy Seat, the propitiatory type, was removed from them (1 Sam. 4:11, 17, 19, 21, 22). God in mercy still cared for His own, and despite not being given the place of leadership, He was watching over them as we find in the book of Esther. Thank God there are things God said concerning Israel and the Mercy Seat that will never be said or done to us. God said concerning Israel: “Pray not thou for this people” (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). Our High Priest and His perfections and efficacy through His sufferings, procuring propitiation will never cause God to say to Christ, “Pray not for this people”. Furthermore, Christ our Propitiation will never be removed from us.
- e) Its exclusiveness:
- i) **He** is the propitiation (1 Jn. 2:2)
- f) Its perpetuity:
- i) He **is** the propitiation (1 Jn. 2:2)
- g) Its fulness universally:
- i) “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 Jn. 2:2)
- h) It is associated with the love of God:
- i) “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 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. 4:9-10)
- i) The authority of Christ’s ability as propitiatory:
- i) “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation” (Rom. 3:25)
- j) Its sufficiency effectively “the forgiveness of sins”:
- i) “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” (Rom. 3:25)

## Simple definitions

### Propitiation:

- a) It is the ability of God, while maintaining His holiness, to righteously live among people who are unholy in unwavering, unchanging perfection, irrespective of what they are or do.

God in mercy found a way whereby His righteous judgment could be righteously demonstrated. This was an act of infinite grace because man, neither by his own doings or animal sacrifices, could ever appease his anger because of their disobedience:

- a) "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." (Amos 5:21-24)
- b) "When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." (Isa. 1:12-15).
- c) God is totally unlike the Greek gods who had to be appeased by the offerings and gifts of men to make them be gracious toward humanity. It is a word which deals with His justice and righteousness being executed righteously.

## When did this plan of propitiation begin? Where did it originate

The whole plan of salvation began with God. Observe carefully:

- a) **God** provided a sacrifice for the sin of Adam before Adam ever existed (Gen. 1:24; 26). While these verses don't say anything about a sacrifice for sin, the point is the sacrificial animals were there before Adam sinned (Gen. 3:21). This indicates the plan of salvation was already in the mind of God and was being foreshadowed before Adam sinned (Gen. 3:1-7). Likewise, before humanity ever walked the sands of time, God in eternity past designed and put into motion the plan of salvation which included redemption, justification, reconciliation, and propitiation.
- b) Not only was salvation and therefore propitiation in the mind of God, but it was also revealed to man, therefore, Abel offered one of the flock (Gen. 4:4) as an offering for his acceptability (Gen. 4:4).
- c) Abraham also knew the plan of **God** for, and in an advancement, of that which perhaps Abel knew. Abraham knew it was to be a burnt offering and God would ultimately provide for Himself a Lamb for a burnt offering (Gen. 22:8). *(I can find no evidence for making the passage say, "God will provide-Himself as the Lamb for a burnt offering". I know this is often said but have never been able to find or be given evidence for this interpretation).*

The New Testament also teaches every aspect of salvation (redemption, reconciliation, justification, propitiation) began in eternity past and originated in the mind of God.

- a) "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2)
- b) "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:4, 5)
- c) "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9)

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- d) “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Pet. 1:18-20)
- e) “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev. 13:8)
- f) “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13)

### Summary

Because God’s justice has been righteously, perfectly, completely, and eternally efficiently met at Calvary, He offers to mankind every blessing of salvation. Consequently, we have a propitiated God, and for those who receive His gift there can be no charge to God’s elect (Rom. 8:33), no condemnation (Rom. 8:34), and no separation (Rom. 8:35). This truth gives the assurance of full justification and eternal glorification (Rom. 8:30).

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**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.  
John 16:13**

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