

The Significance of Christ's Propitiation (part four) By Jay Wegter

“Sin makes cowards of us all” (Paul Zahl, *Who Will Deliver Us?*). The human condition is such that the law of God continually judges us and finds us wanting. Not one of us can say that we have loved God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength for even an hour. According to the book of Romans, the judgment of the law is internalized in the conscience (Rom 2:12-16). The law operates in the conscience as a principle of self-condemnation, judging us wanting if we are not found capable of perfect obedience. Our response to this condemnation of conscience is *fear of punishment* – “fear has to do with punishment” (1 Jn 4:18). We will do almost anything to ward off threats of condemnation—we will go to great lengths to defend against judgment (avoid guilt). Because our consciences carry a deep sense of moral failure against God’s law, much energy is exerted in seeking to avoid any additional condemnation. Due to our depravity, human nature cannot adequately meet judgment. According to the Bible, it is impossible to work our way out of condemnation. The harder we try to live up to the law, the worse we feel about our failure (Zahl, p. 38). Our greatest need is personal atonement for guilt. Zahl notes that much of our working and striving involves an attempt to offset or “atone” for our failure. Like an accounting spread sheet, we try to pencil into our consciences more credits than debits! The law beckons us to *return* to the legal principle of justification by works—“I am what I do.” We become stuck in patterns of performance and seeking to ‘measure up.’ Self-righteousness and self-justification begins contaminating our works. Oh, how we need to feed on the propitiation! For, in Christ’s atoning death, God’s unbending justice was fully satisfied toward the believing sinner. How many times do we stop short of reckoning the propitiation on our behalf and as a result live with a sullied conscience? God gave Christ to be our propitiation so that we might be perfected by God’s love (1 Jn 4:10-19). ‘Dead works’ can never bring balance to the ‘ledger sheet’ of conscience. Let us practice going more quickly to the perfect atonement accomplished for us. Not only is propitiation the means of a clear conscience, it is also the lens through which we see God’s fatherly disposition toward us. God could not adopt us as sons until our enmity of

heart was cleaned out. When our first parents sinned, the satanic lie filled their hearts with darkness. They no longer regarded God's glory and their highest good to be compatible. In Christ's atoning work, He steps into that dark maelstrom of enmity, suspicion, hostility, and hatred of God and bears its wrath and curse. This means that at the moment of salvation when the believing sinner sees by faith a crucified Savior pumping out His heart's life blood for the likes of him—a miracle takes place. Suddenly that person sees the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). God is no longer 'hidden'. His mighty attributes, love, and wisdom are seen in the work of Christ. Wonder of wonders, in an instant the hostility engendered by the ancient lie is cleaned out of the heart of the believing sinner (Col 1:19-23). Everything changes; the confidence that God's glory and our good are joined is now made perfectly clear in the gospel to the new believer—for now God's glory and our eternal good are forever joined in Christ.

CONCLUSION: We have seen that propitiation is the revelation of God's righteousness and that the Father's disposition toward a world of sinners is *propitious* through Christ. In addition, we have marveled that Christ has entered the human condition—at the cross He became our *derelection*—our 'forsakenness'. This must move us and stagger us; that in His passion and humiliation, Christ assumed our forsakenness and our reproach in order that what separated us from God might be removed. Thus, by His abandonment at Calvary, we might be given perfect access, intimacy, favor and communion with God. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning" (Ps 22:1). "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come" (Heb 13:12-14). Do you see how this vital doctrine of propitiation is necessary for our spiritual wellbeing? The use of this doctrine is both for our holiness and our comfort. We have seen that the propitiation allows our life to be controlled by God's love; but it is not a content-less, sentimental love—it is absolutely goal oriented. He called us to be conformed to His Son (Rom 8:29-30; 2 Thess 2:13-14; Heb 12:14). Thus, the cross shapes our entire life so that we are to be continually 'calibrated' to God's holiness.

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.” If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ (1 Pet 1:14-19).

The propitiation accomplished at Calvary has set us free from sin, guilt and death; BUT we are to use this blood-bought freedom wisely in order to retain it. “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal 3:13-14). Do you want to know Christ better? Do you want greater views of the Father’s heart of love? Do you want to know more of who God is toward you in Christ? Do you want to review how God makes His people holy? Then send your troubled, beat-up conscience on a journey to view the Son of man suffering in your place. Stand on this mountain peak of propitiation and breathe the pure air of God’s love to His redeemed sons and daughters.