

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

In an effort to better understand the sufficiency of Christ's work, it is in our interest to investigate the depths of our ruin in Adam. The human condition by reason of original sin is described in Scripture as blindness, rebellion, enmity, helplessness, futile thinking, bondage, and alienation, etc. From the vantage point of the damage to relationship alone we may describe the human condition as one of *dereliction*. This is a rich word to capture the tragedy of man's state after the fall, for *dereliction* means dilapidation due to abandonment. Abandonment can have a double meaning here: Adam was willfully negligent, having abandoned his duty to obey his Creator. As a consequence, he was abandoned to the sinful state into which he fell, and with him, the entire human race. There is no greater consideration in theology than the question: *how far did Adam fall?* For the answer to that question will shed great light on what Christ did to restore sinners from ruin. At the fall, the entire human race was plunged into a state of dereliction (alienation, corruption, brokenness) through original sin. We could expand upon this consequence of sin by describing it as *dis-relatedness*. The essence of loss of relationship is captured in a series of *separations* which resulted from original sin. Man became separated from God. Man became separated from other human beings (Adam blamed Eve for his sin); man became separated from himself (his soul's peace was supplanted with guilt, conflict, and defilement); and man was separated from nature (the creation became hostile to man via the curse: flood, frost, heat, natural disasters, quakes, hostile predators, infection, mosquito born disease, famines, plagues, etc.). Apart from redemption, the separations described above culminate in the ultimate separation of the soul from the body at death and separation from God in hell which is finalized at the Last Judgment. As we consider just how far Adam fell, it becomes our necessary vantage point from which to view the work of Christ. For, only in understanding the gravity of the disaster will we be able to understand how drastic the cure must be. Only from this perspective will we truly know what the Son of God did to reverse that destruction (Eph 2:1-10). So serious was our ruin in Adam that man is unable to contribute to his own recovery. God has taken salvation out of man's hands. This is intensely humbling. When the sinner first learns that he cannot generate a single meritorious deed by which he may 'trade' with heaven for favor, it is devastating to his

pride. This devastation is an important stage in the sinner's conviction. For, if he believes that his efforts at self-reformation may soften up God and kindly dispose Him, then that man is still under the influence of self-righteousness. Only the in-breaking of God's grace can terminate this cycle of self-deception. Eventually, the sinner prepared by the Holy Spirit during conviction moves from devastation to desperation when he begins to understand that he cannot offset one iota of his legal guilt and condemnation before God. The great Scriptural drama of unfolding redemption reveals that God addresses man's ruin decisively by means of substitution. Salvation must come from outside of man (the very opposite of today's new 'spirituality'). The solution to man's problem is not within himself—there is nothing in man that can be developed into something pleasing to God (Rom 8:5-8). The only possible answer to man's 'dead end' hopeless dilemma is if a perfectly holy person acts on behalf of the guilty and disobedient. This is precisely what Christ did. By God's decree and foreordained plan, Christ stepped into the room and stead of helpless sinners to act on their behalf (Acts 2:22-24; 4:11-26). Let us consider again the seriousness of the problem addressed by our Savior: man the sinner forfeited his 'right' to the life, light, blessedness, glory, and favor of God (Rom 3:23). God is the source of these essentials for living—and man was created to 'run on God' if you will. Without God, we do not have these essentials for life; and we cannot function according to our created purpose as the image of God. But, man in his depraved and arrogant state pretends that he may find these blessings in the world instead of in his Creator. So he worships and serves the creature and the creation instead of his Creator (Rom 1:25). The testimony of God in Scripture reveals the human condition: by reason of sin we are cut off from the life of God. And, without the love, light, life, blessedness, and favor of God we are destined to descend deeper into darkness and misery and ultimately will perish. If left to ourselves, perish we will; for God is just and righteous to shut us out of His presence forever when we worship the creation and ourselves instead of Him. So, the great question behind the saving grace of God is: "How may God be consistent with His own perfections, AND, at the same time fully export these essentials of life into our experience and into our eternity?" "How can God do this and still be immutably holy?" The book of Romans was written to

answer this question. For the longest treatise on salvation in the Bible (Romans) explains in great detail how the unrighteous may be righteous by faith in order to be right with the Righteous One (Rom 1:16-17).