

Propitiation

The heart of the Gospel; the light of the Gospel; the vantage point of the Gospel

By Jay Wegter

I. The righteousness of God

A. God's *righteousness* is His commitment to His name.

- 1 God always acts on behalf of His Name (Ps 31:1-3).
- 2 His faithfulness to His Name is grounded in the display of His glory (Ps 79:9).
- 3 Therefore, man's righteousness will be seen as radically God-centered (Ps 64:10).
- 4 Thus, to fear and love God is to esteem His Name (Mal 3:16-18).

B. God always *acts consistently* with His love of His own glory.

- 1 The glory of God and the salvation of His people are accomplished together—this is a source of endless delight for the people of God (Eph 1:5-6).
- 2 God opposes all who refuse to find delight in His glory (Ps 52:5-7).
- 3 To be *wrongly adjusted* to the knowledge of God and the purpose of God (His glory) is to be under the wrath of God (Rom 1:18ff.).

C. Only in Christ are believing sinners declared righteous, or '*rightly adjusted*' to God's righteousness ('right' with God's righteousness).

- 1 God is exalting His righteousness by giving *right-standing* to believing sinners as a gift of His grace. God is making His own righteousness the cause of the sinner's salvation (Rom 1:17).
- 2 Every imaginable hiding place outside of Christ is a *refuge of lies* (Is 28:17).
- 3 Only those *right with God* can take delight in who God is (Rom 5:1-2).

II. The great need for a perfect propitiation

A. Defining propitiation: *Propitiation is an atoning sacrifice that satisfies God's wrath on behalf of those for whom it is made.*

B. God's *holy character* demands that He punish all sin.

- 1 God's holy character is *codified* in the Law; the Ten Commandments. The Law of God reveals the sinfulness of sin (Rom 3:19-22).
- 2 All sin is *lawlessness* (1 Jn 3:4).
- 3 All sin is ultimately against God Himself (Ps 51:4).

C. God's punishment of sin will be *absolutely comprehensive*.

- 1 Judgment will extend to thoughts, words, motives, and secrets of the heart. The secrets of the heart will be revealed publicly on Judgment Day (Rom 2:16; Matt 12:36-37).
- 2 Those who hope to have the severity of judgment lessened by their moral and religious works will be horrified at the final verdict (Rom 2:1-9).

D. God's wrath revealed is His righteousness reacting to unrighteousness.

- 1 The wrath of God is personal, potent, comprehensive, and eternal (Heb 10:26-31; 12:29).
- 2 His wrath is the expression of His holy Law and moral government over mankind (1 Pet 1:16).
- 3 God declares that vengeance and retribution belong to Him; He will *repay* (Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30).

E. Sin is man's greatest problem; forgiveness is man's greatest need.

- 1 The matchless gift of divine forgiveness and justifying grace is the basis of our relationship with God (Eph 1:7; Ps 65:3-4).
- 2 The reception of forgiveness is stipulated upon a crushing recognition of the seriousness of personal sins (Lu 18:13).
- 3 The Holy Spirit brings both the depth of *conviction of sin* and the recognition of God's *readiness to forgive* (Jn 16:8-11; Is 55:6-11; 43:25-26).

III. The five *pillars* in God's plan of propitiation

A. (Pillar One) Propitiation is required by God's character

1. The means of salvation (the cross of Christ) must uphold, exalt, and vindicate God's justice.

- All the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge are in Christ (Col 2:2-3).
- God's justice is vindicated and exalted in propitiation (Rom 3:25-26).
- Our punishment is borne by the Lawgiver Himself (Heb 1:1-3).

2. The divine *legal basis* for God forgiving sinners is propitiation.

- Christ's death for us allows God to be *legally free* to pardon sin. The propitiation sets God free to pour out His grace and forgiveness upon every sinner who believes the Gospel (2 Cor 5:21).
- God's honor is linked to the fact that propitiation is the *legal basis* for the divine forgiveness of sins (Rom 3:25-26).

B. (Pillar Two) Propitiation is initiated by God's love

1. Propitiation is the heart of the Gospel (Jn 3:16).

- The plan to give His only begotten Son comes from the Father's *heart of love* (1 Jn 4:9-10).
- Christ was displayed publicly by God as a *propitiation* (as an atoning sacrifice) (Rom 3:25).
- The message of propitiation is indispensable to a *saving understanding* of the Gospel (1 Cor 15:3-4).

2. The Father sent the Son for the work of propitiation.

- Propitiation is the work of God Himself (2 Cor 5:19).
- The glorious news of the Gospel is that God *propitiates* His own wrath (Rom 5:9).
- It is the message of propitiation alone that can reach the conscience of the sinner (Heb 9:14).

C. (Pillar Three) Propitiation is defined by substitution

1. God never excuses sin, nor does He forgive sin by means of leniency.

- Forgiveness is only through the shed blood of Christ (1 Pet 2:24).
- Pardon for sin is based solely upon substitution (1 Pet 3:18).
- The value of the atoning sacrifice for sin is totally determined by the Judge (1 Pet 1:17-21).

2. When God forgives sins it is founded upon a *judicial act*—the propitiation of Christ.

- In a sense *God only forgives what He pays for* (Is 53:4-6, 10-12).
- The new covenant was prophesied in the O.T. as a covenant of comprehensive forgiveness of sins (Heb 8:6-13).
- The new covenant was inaugurated *in Christ's blood* (Mt 26:28; 1 Cor 11:23-26).

3. Christ's death was a true penal substitution.

- The value of Christ's atonement is established by the Judge of all the earth. At salvation, the believing sinner 'sees' the blood of Christ as God sees the blood (1 Pet 1:18-19).
- God's plan to save through the death of the Messiah was announced ahead of time in the O.T. as a penal substitution (the *substitution concept* occurs 11 times in Isaiah 53).
- Christ our penal substitute is the glory of the Gospel (Heb 13:10-15).

D. (Pillar Four) Propitiation was accomplished once for all by Christ's death

1. God's broken law must be vindicated if sinners are to be restored.

- The *trampling* of God's law is defiance of God's holy character and the profaning of His holy Name

(Ez 36:23-26).

- The breaking and trampling of God's law must be answered by God's justice if sinners are to be cleared of guilt (1 Pet 2:24; 3:18).

2. Propitiation is a *transaction* between the Father and the Son (Heb 7:27; 9:14).

- Christ proclaimed from the cross that the work given to Him by the Father was finished (Jn 19:30).
- The Holy Spirit keeps *displaying Christ and His blood* to the child of God—as the basis of our pardon and acceptance with God (1 Jn 4:9-19; Jn 16:14).
- The Christian must learn to *run to the atonement* and to keep *calling upon* Christ as his High Priest (Heb 4:14-16).

3. Propitiation *pacified* the wrath of God for all who believe.

- As a true substitution Christ's death for us *quenched* divine wrath against us (Gal 3:10-14).
- We must avoid all suggestions that wrath is unworthy of God (Rom 2:1-10).

E. (Pillar Five) Propitiation is appropriated by faith

1. Faith is the *transfer* of reliance away from self to Christ.

- Faith is the instrument by which propitiation is applied to us (Rom 3:21-22).
- Faith is submission to God's righteousness and it is confidence, or *moral trust* in Christ (Rom 10:4).

2. Saving faith is *self-renouncing*—it looks away from self to Christ alone for righteousness.

- Faith is the rejection of self as making any contribution to salvation (Phil 3:8-11).
- Faith is produced by the Word of Christ through the work of the Spirit (Rom 10:17).

IV. Propitiation is the brilliant *light of the Gospel*

A. Propitiation reveals the holy character of God, the loving heart of God, and the moral guilt and degradation of the sinner.

1. All three are revealed in the saving message of the Gospel (Rom 5:6-11).
2. All three are brought together in God's plan to send Christ to be the propitiation for our sins (Col 2:9-14).

B. Who God is can only be known by how He saves (propitiation).

1. How God saves is the ultimate expression of His character and attributes (2 Cor 5:19-21).

2. Nothing can remedy the human condition but the Almighty Lawgiver dying in place of the sinner (Jn 10:7-19).
3. The knowledge of God and His glory is veiled apart from the Gospel (2 Cor 4:4-6).
4. Every false gospel expresses an idolatrous concept of God (2 Cor 11:3-4, 13-15; Gal 1:6-9).

C. Christ's work of propitiation reveals the glory of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:4-6).

1. By the power of God's Spirit, the light of the Gospel dispels the darkness from man's heart, and brings the saving knowledge of God (2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:21-23).
2. For the redeemed, God's cause becomes our cause. God's cause—His glory—becomes the believer's purpose and calling (1 Cor 10:31; Eph 3:21).

D. Christ is *High Priest* of the propitiation He accomplished.

1. Christ alone (not the church) dispenses (or *mediates*) the benefits of His saving work (Heb 5:5-10).
2. Christ holds His priesthood permanently and untransferably (Heb 7:25-28).
3. Christ is Mediator of the covenant He inaugurated in His blood (Heb 8:6-13).
4. Our confident access to God is through Christ and His finished work (Eph 2:17-18; Heb 10:19-23).

V. The whole message of Scripture can be viewed from the mountain peak of propitiation

A. Propitiation is the driving force of Jesus' life.

1. Jesus believed in the necessity of His own death (Jn 10:1-18).
2. Jesus repeatedly announced His impending death to His disciples (Lu 9:22; Mt 16:21-22).

B. Propitiation reveals the ultimate destiny of those who reject the Gospel.

1. The cross is a monument to the world that man deserves to die and be cut off from God who is the only source of all light, life, love, and blessedness (Ez 18:4).
2. Crushing eternal suffering is reserved for those who refuse to repent (Rom 2:1-9).
3. We look at the cross to see the final form of God's judicial reaction to human sin: death, wrath, crushing suffering, and alienation from God (Rom 2:9).

C. Propitiation gives us needed insight into God's gift of peace.

1. Propitiation produces the most radical change in status imaginable; the sinner moves from condemnation to peace with God (Rom 5:1-11).

2. Christ Himself is our peace (Eph 2:14).

D. Propitiation helps us begin to grasp the dimensions of God's love.

1. Christ brings us as near to God as a creature can possibly be (Rev 21:1-7).
2. Propitiation is the measure of God's love to us in Christ (Eph 5:25-27; 1 Jn 4:10).

E. Propitiation sheds light upon our understanding of God's glory.

1. The work of Christ in propitiation is the highest possible source of glory to God (Jn 13:31-32).
2. Contemplation of our ruin by sin is the prerequisite for seeing the glory of God in the Propitiation (Lu 18:13; Acts 2:37; 16:30).

VI. The ramifications of knowing that God propitiates His own wrath:

A. Man can have no part in the atonement (the book of Hebrews completely condemns any religion with a mediating priesthood).

1. After the finished work of Christ, the N.T. sounds the *death knell* for any religious system that maintains a priesthood (Heb 7:23-28).
2. The theme of the book of Hebrews is the superiority of Christ as High Priest forever (Heb 7).

B. The Trinity is involved in man's salvation. The Father *planned* man's redemption; the Son *accomplished* man's redemption; The Spirit *applies* man's redemption.

C. All barriers to love and fellowship with God are removed when propitiation is applied to the believing sinner (1 Jn 4:9-19).

1. Christ removes everything that *disqualifies* us for a love relationship with God (1 Jn 4:9-19).
2. Christ is our immutable *eligibility* for eternal favor with God (Rom 8:31-35).

D. It is only possible to know God if one knows God has given His Son to be the propitiation for sin.

1. The sinner who savingly *knows God* knows Him as propitious in Christ (Acts 13:38-39).
2. The redeemed relate to God as He who *atones* and He who is *atoned for* (Rom 3:26).