

What Is Propitiation? (Part One)

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God the Father is spiritually pure, incorruptible, and undefiled. By way of contrast, Moses records God's description of humanity just before the Great Flood: "So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth" (Genesis 6:12). The apostle Paul adds this declaration in Titus 1:15-16: "To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled . . . being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work."

How, then, can a corrupt and defiled human ever have the kind of relationship—required for salvation—with the spiritually pure and incorruptible God (Job 25:4)? How can God justify His benevolence toward guilty humanity, which is worthy only of the death penalty? Since humanity's corruption interposes a seemingly inexorable chasm of judgment and wrath, actively separating man from God, how can there be any agreement—any reconciliation?

To the repentant sinner, through the atoning blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God provides a way across the formidable chasm (Colossians 1:20-23).

The term for this provision is *propitiation* (Hebrews 2:17).

1. What is propitiation? Why is it necessary? Romans 3:10-20, 23-26; 6:23; Isaiah 59:2.

Comment: The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states, "Propitiation needs to be studied in connection with reconciliation" (II Corinthians 5:18). *Easton's Bible Dictionary* defines it as "that by which God is rendered propitious, i.e., by which it becomes consistent with His character and government to pardon and bless the sinner." Propitiation signifies what Christ became for all mankind—a sacrifice capable of bearing and absorbing God's judgment while turning His justifiable wrath to favor (Romans 5:8-9). It expresses the idea that Jesus endured His crucifixion to pay the price for sin that a holy God demands from the sinner (Genesis 2:17; Romans 1:32).

Propitiation is necessary because humanity's sinful nature stands in defiance of God's sacred law and holiness (Romans 8:7), separating people from God (Isaiah 59:2) and earning them the death penalty (Romans 6:23). God does not cause the separation but man. Therefore, someone—sinless and of perfect nature and held by God in the highest regard (Colossians 1:19; Matthew 3:17)—is required to intercede for man, to atone for human sin and guilt and alter humanity's standing before God—and in turn—to alter God's disposition toward mankind. This "someone" is Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:17; Romans 3:24-25).

2. What was required of Christ to become our propitiation? Hebrews 4:15; 9:26, 28; Luke 9:22.

Comment: Our Savior's perfect, sacrificial life and death were not merely displays of His righteous prowess. God the Father required Christ's unblemished life and death so that the law's legal requirement—that there is a price for every person's sins—could be

satisfied once for all by His shed blood (II Corinthians 5:15; Hebrews 9:28). Furthermore, only a sinless Jesus Christ, as the antitype of the unblemished sin offering (I Peter 1:19; Leviticus 9:3; John 1:29), could appeal to God the Father as our Advocate without compromising His righteousness or law (Job 8:3; Deuteronomy 32:4), thereby atoning for the repentant person's sins and reconciling him or her to God (Psalm 51:1-4; Romans 3:25-26; I John 2:1-2).

3. Does propitiation originate with God the Father? Romans 8:3-4; II Corinthians 5:18-21; Ephesians 1:3-8, 11; I John 4:9-10. Does it change Him? Psalm 102:27; Malachi 3:6.

Comment: Being immutable, God is always the same (James 1:17). He always knew that man would sin and thus need a special means of salvation that does not naturally exist. So, from before the foundation of the world, God foreordained Christ to provide that special means (I Peter 1:17-21)—to be our propitiation. This process does not change God—merely His disposition (Jeremiah 18:8; Joel 2:13). In fact, by appeasing His wrath, it provides the means to restore the relationship that—before sin—existed between Him and humanity (Acts 3:19-21; Malachi 3:7).

4. What must the sinner do to take advantage of Christ's propitiatory sacrifice? Luke 24:46-47; Acts 3:19.

Comment: It is by the Father's plan (Romans 8:3-4) that Christ's sacrifice has rendered Him propitious toward all men, converted and unconverted (I John 2:2). We can thank God that the penalty that would prevent us from receiving salvation has now been paid for all sinners. However, a person *must* repent, accept Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior, and be baptized in order to receive the benefit of His propitiatory sacrifice (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3).

In the next issue, we will focus on the Greek terminology critical to understanding the origin and fulfillment of the propitiation process.