

Notes for Chattanooga 2015

Christ, our Propitiation

Conference Theme: *The Essential Nature of Love*

Define “love” — Classical Greek: Eros, Phileo, Agape

Agape love is doing what is in the best interest of the one being loved, despite the condition or desire of the one being loved.

God’s love is “agape,” sacrificial love.

What are we “saved” from? The fierce wrath of God’s anger against sin (all sin, our sin).

The greatest demonstration of such love is found in His willingness to satisfy His own wrath in the death of His Son.

1John 4:10 — In this is love (or “Herein is love”), not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The very fact that God had to pour out His wrath on His Son is sure evidence that humans were not able to appease God on their own.

It is also evidence that God's love is specific and not indiscriminate.

"What is propitiation?"

In Ryrie's "Basic Theology" we read, "Propitiation means the turning away of wrath by an offering. In relation to soteriology, propitiation means placating or satisfying the wrath of God by the atoning sacrifice of Christ."

Basically: appeasement, or satisfaction, specifically towards God that results in wrath or anger being abated.

Or, to put it another way: Propitiation is a two-part act that involves appeasing the wrath of an offended person and being reconciled to him.

This is not unique to Christianity. The necessity of appeasing God is something many religions have in common. In ancient pagan religions, as well as in many non-Christian religions today, the idea is taught that man appeases God by offering various gifts or sacrifices. The Greeks believed that their pagan gods were constantly angry with humans. So it was necessary to find ways to settle them down and avoid their anger.

However, the Bible teaches that God Himself has provided the only means through which His wrath can be appeased and sinful man can be reconciled to Him.

In the New Testament, the act of propitiation always refers to the work of God and not the sacrifices or gifts offered by man. The reason for this is that man is totally incapable of satisfying God's justice except by spending eternity in hell.

There is no service, sacrifice or gift that man can offer that will appease the holy wrath of God or satisfy His perfect justice. The only satisfaction, or propitiation, that could be acceptable to God and that could reconcile man to Him, had to be made by God.

For this reason God the Son, Jesus Christ, came into the world in human flesh to be the perfect sacrifice for sin and make atonement or “propitiation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17).

Hebrews 2:14-18 — Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. (16) For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. (17) Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation (some translations say “make reconciliation” but the correct translation would be “propitiation”) for the sins of the people. (18) For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Notice that the author of Hebrews just made a connection between the High Priest and propitiation. That’s because this concept reaches back into the Old Testament.

In **1 John 2:2; 4:10**, Christ is called the "propitiation for our sins." The Greek noun is *hilasmos*.

But, the word “propitiation” also appears in **Romans 3:25** and **Hebrews 9:5**

Romans 3:21-25 — But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, (22) even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those

who believe; for there is no distinction; (23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (24) being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; (25) whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation (*hilasterion*) in His blood through faith.

Hebrews 9:1-5 — Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. (2) For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. (3) Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, (4) having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; (5) and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat (*hilasterion*); but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

In Rom. 3:25 and Heb. 9:5 the Greek same word — *hilasterion* — is used.

In the Septuagint (LXX) — a Greek version of the Old Testament — the word *hilasterion* is employed Ex. 25:17 and elsewhere as the equivalent for the Hebrew *kapporeth*, which means "covering," and is used of the lid of the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:21; 30:6).

The Greek word "hilasterion" is used 22 times in the OT.

On the Day of Atonement the high priest carried the blood of the sacrifice he offered for all the people within the veil and sprinkled with it the "mercy-seat," and so made *propitiation*.

Hilasterion came to denote not only the mercy-seat or lid of the ark, but also propitiation or reconciliation by blood.

In the New Covenant, Christ becomes the place where atonement is made. He is the covering for our sin. And He is the sacrifice that successfully accomplishes propitiation on our behalf, satisfying the wrath of God in His own body and making reconciliation between God and the people God has given to the Son.

It's a really, truly wonderful work, forecast in advance by 1400 years of pouring animal blood on the mercy seat.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). There is no other propitiation or sacrifice that can be made for the sin of human beings. Only God could successfully propitiate the wrath of God.

And, praise God, that's exactly what He did.

(Are you feeling securely saved, yet?)

So, how did we get from "hilasterion" to "propitiation"?

From the Latin word "propitiatorium". When the Old Testament was translated to Latin, that's the word they used to translate "hilasterion." It means "favorable, gracious, kind."

Now, some of you may have other translations of the Bible. If you are reading a Revised Standard Version, you may have noticed that word hilasterion is translated as “expiation” rather than “propitiation.”

The same Greek word is translated by both the words expiation and propitiation from time to time. But there is a slight difference in the terms.

Remember that what Christ did has two parts: He not only bore the wrath of God on our behalf, but He also made reconciliation that resulted in our right-standing before God.

The difference between the two English words is:

Propitiation literally means to make favorable and specifically includes the idea of dealing with God’s wrath against sinners. Expiation literally means to make pious and implies either the removal, wiping away, or cleansing of sin.

Personally, I think that “propitiation” is the better translation because it includes the idea of expiation as a means to satisfying God. But, “expiation” has no reference to quenching God’s righteous anger.

The difference is that the object of expiation is sin, not God. One propitiates a person, and one expiates a problem. Christ's death was therefore both an expiation and a propitiation. By expiating (removing the problem of) sin God was made propitious (favorable) to us.

In other words: Expiation is the act that results in the change of God’s disposition toward us. It is what Christ did on the cross, and the result of Christ’s work of expiation is propitiation—God’s anger is turned away. The

distinction is the same as that between the ransom that is paid and the attitude of the one who receives the ransom.

1John 2:2

“And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:2)

Now, there is one verse in the NT that utilizes the language of propitiation that our Arminian friends love. They will frequently point to it in order to prove the universality of Christ’s atoning work. It’s —

John 2:2 (ESV) — He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

KJV — 1John 2:1-2 -- My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (2) And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

The word “world” is the Greek “kosmos.”

Key question: Does the word "world" mean "everyone who ever lived"?

While it is true that “kosmos” sometimes denotes “every part and parcel of the whole earth,” most often it means, “people of all kindred, tribes and nations, as opposed to Israelites exclusively.”

This variation of meaning becomes obvious as we look at the Apostle John's own use of this word. He employed the word "kosmos" 82 times in his gospel. Here's just a sampling ---

John 1:10 -- "He was in the world (the population, He was not in the physical structure), and the world (the actual Earth) was made by him, and the world (the people) knew him not."

In that short verse we get three different nuances of the single word "kosmos."

John 1:29 -- "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

John was saying one of two things, here. Either he was saying:

- 1) Behold the sacrificial lamb (typified by Israel's sin offerings) that will remove every sin of every person who ever lived. Or,
- 2) Behold the sacrificial lamb that will remove not only the sin of Israelites but of people from every kindred, tribe, tongue and nation.

If statement number 1 is true, then every sin of every person who ever lived was paid for at Calvary and God cannot judge anyone on the basis of their actions, thoughts, deeds, rebellion or even unbelief, inasmuch as those sins are all paid for.

If statement number 2 is true, then the word “kosmos” can be used in a more narrow sense that includes people of all nations, but not every single person of all nations.

John 7:4 -- “For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world.”

Jesus’ brothers were encouraging Him to go up to the feast at Jerusalem, work some miracles and spread His fame. But obviously, the whole world was not at Jerusalem. They were simply saying, “Go make yourself public.”

John 12:19 -- “The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after him.”

The Pharisees did not mean to claim that people on distant continents were following Jesus at that moment. But, a large crowd in Jerusalem did. So again we see an example of the narrow scope of “kosmos.”

John 7:7 -- “The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.”

Here, Jesus spoke of the “kosmos” hating Him. But, not everyone who ever lived hated Him. Rather, Jesus spoke of the majority of the populace who stood against Him. But importantly, He did not mean that “everyone who ever lived” opposed Him.

John 13:1 -- “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”

John drew a distinction between the “kosmos” and those that Jesus loved. In other words, those that belonged to Him were in the world and He loved them to the end. But, He contrasted them with “the world.” That’s a critical distinction. So critical, in fact, that Jesus went on to pray only for His own beloved people, but not for the world.

John 17:6-9 -- “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.”

So, if “kosmos” means “everybody who ever lived,” why would Jesus draw this line of demarcation between the world and “the men which thou gavest me out of the world”? Jesus prayed specifically for those people God gave Him (“for they are thine”) and He specifically did not pray for “the world.”

Again, “kosmos” does not always mean “everyone who ever lived.” It most often means “people of every nationality as opposed to Israelites exclusively.”

But, the reality is ...

Neither Jesus nor John ever taught that God loved and paid the sin penalty for everybody who ever lived.

John 14:16-17 -- “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” (John 14:16-17)

The Holy Ghost is the “proof positive” of salvation. He is the “token” of the New Covenant of salvation by grace through faith. Only those who receive the Holy Ghost will receive eternal life.

Yet, Jesus said that the world “cannot receive” the Spirit of Truth. In fact, the world does not see him or know him. So does that mean that "everyone who ever lived" does not receive or know the Holy Spirit?

John 15:19 --“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”

Now attempt to read that verse and substitute “everybody who ever lived” for the word “world.” Suddenly, the verse makes no sense at all. –

“If you were part of everybody who ever lived, then everybody who ever lived would love his own; but you are not part of everybody who ever lived,

but I have chosen you out of everybody who ever lived, therefore everybody who ever lived hates you.”

“Kosmos” simply does not mean “everybody who ever lived.”

REMEMBER: John was an apostle to the circumcision -- the the Jews.

Galatians 2:7-9 -- But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), (9) and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

SO, WITH ALL THAT IN MIND, WHAT JOHN WROTE WAS:

John 2:2 (ESV) — He is the propitiation for our (us Jews) sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (non-Jewish people, Gentiles, every kindred, tribe, nation).

And Jesus propiated God on behalf of those who belong to Him.

So, all that being said --

Why propitiation? Because God is holy -- and loving.

Because He's holy, He cannot condone our sin. But because He loves His own, the atoning work of Christ paid and satisfied the demands of God's holy law and demonstrated His great love that goes far beyond the law.

The Greek gods were waiting and expecting men to appease them. The God of Bible took it upon Himself to satisfy Himself and He condescended to offer His own son as a remedy for our deepest problem.

Jesus is the antidote to our disease.

For while we were still *helpless*, at the right time Christ died for *the ungodly*.

Romans 5:6

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us. **Romans 5:8**

For if *while we were enemies* we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. **Romans 5:10**

So, to close --

How should we react to this wonderful news?

Philippians 2 fits in.

Phil. 2:1-10 -- Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (5) Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

He loved us sacrificially, so we are called to love each other the same way. Our differences are miniscule when compared to the chasm between our individual sinfulness and God's holiness. Yet, He bridged that gap on our behalf. The least we can do is forgive each other when our minor gaps occur.