
Reconciliation, Propitiation, and The Barrier

This paper is a brief study of the Biblical doctrines of reconciliation and propitiation, which are vitally important to a Christian's understanding of how God has made it possible for any person to have a good relationship with Him. Jesus Christ, by bearing our sins on the cross, fulfilled God's requirements for a perfect sacrifice; and the effect was to remove all impediments to our receiving eternal life and having fellowship with God.

Reconciliation

The word reconciliation refers to the process of changing something thoroughly and adjusting it to something else that is a standard. For example, when you adjust your watch to a time signal, you are reconciling the watch to a time standard. When you reconcile your checkbook, the standard to which you match it is the bank's record of your account. On rare occasions the bank must reconcile its accounts to yours.

In the Bible, reconciliation is the word used to refer to the process by which God changes human beings and adjusts them to the standard of His perfect character. Rom. 11:15 refers to the "reconciling of the world". The Greek word used here is the noun *καταλλαγή* (*katallagei*). This word is also used in Rom. 5:11, "...but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation." Note that man is not active in reconciliation and provides nothing toward reconciliation. Read also 2 Cor. 5:17-21.

Reconciliation also appears in the verb form *καταλλασσω* (*katallasso*), meaning "to reconcile". It is used in the active voice in 2 Cor. 5:18 with the meaning of "reconciling someone to someone else." In this case, God reconciles us to Himself, through the Lord Jesus Christ. This verb in the passive voice means "to be reconciled" or "to become reconciled", and it is used in the case of man's relationship to God in Rom. 5:10 and 2 Cor. 5:20. The passive voice is also used in cases of reconciliation between people, as in 1 Cor. 7:11 and Matt. 5:24.

Another Greek word translated "to reconcile" is *ιλασκομαι* (*hilaskomai*), meaning "to reconcile" in the sense of providing propitiation, as in Luke

18:13. It is used of the activity of the Lord Jesus Christ as High Priest in making reconciliation for His people, Heb. 2:17.

Rom. 5:6-11 points out that the whole world needs to be reconciled to God. Note the adjectives in this passage which stress this need: "ungodly", "without strength", "sinners" and "enemies".

Reconciliation is an important consideration in the study of the doctrine of the barrier. By the death of Christ on the cross, the world is thoroughly changed in its relationship to God, Eph. 2:14-18 and Col. 1:20-22. That is, through the cross of Christ the world is so altered in its position respecting the character and judgment of God that God does not now impute sin to human beings. The world is therefore rendered savable!

Because the position of the world before God is completely changed through the substitutionary atonement of Christ, God's attitude toward man can no longer be the same. God can now deal with souls in the light of Christ's work.

Notice that God is never said to be reconciled to man. God is immutable, so He does not change. Reconciliation is only possible in one direction. What sometimes seems to be a change in God is actually an unchanged attitude of God viewing a reconciled man. God, having now accepted Christ's work, is able to continue to be just toward man. He can now offer salvation.

A person profits from reconciliation by faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Once he becomes a believer, a person can partake in all of the blessings which accompany his position in Christ, including the privileges accruing from reconciliation.

The believer, in turn, has the responsibility of becoming a minister of reconciliation, 2 Cor. 5:18-19. The truth of reconciliation is one of the key salvation doctrines to be used in witnessing to those without Christ.

Propitiation

Propitiation is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ by which He appeases the wrath of God and conciliates Him who would otherwise be offended by our sin and would demand that we pay the penalty for it.

Propitiation is translated from the Greek ἱλασ터리ον (**hilasterion**), meaning "that which expiates or propitiates" or "the gift which procures propitiation". The word is also used in the New Testament for the place of propitiation, the "mercy seat". Heb. 9:5. There is frequent similar use of **hilasterion** in the Septuagint. Ex. 25:18 ff. The mercy seat was sprinkled with atoning blood on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:14), representing that the righteous sentence of the Law had been executed, changing a judgment seat into a mercy seat (Heb. 9:11-15; compare with "throne of grace" in Heb. 4:14-16; place of communion, Ex. 25:21-22).

Another Greek word, ἱλασμος (**hilasmos**), is used for Christ as our propitiation. 1 John 2:2; 4:10, and for "atonement" in the Septuagint (Lev. 25:9). The thought in the Old Testament sacrifices and in the New Testament fulfillment is that Christ completely satisfied the just demands of a holy God for judgment on sin by His death on the cross.

God, foreseeing the cross, is declared righteous in forgiving sins in the Old Testament period as well as in justifying sinners under the new covenant (Rom. 3:25, 26; cf. Ex. 29:33, note). Propitiation is not the placating of a vengeful God but, rather, it is the satisfying the righteousness of a holy God, thereby making it possible for Him to show mercy without compromising His righteousness or justice.

The Hebrew **kaphar**, means "to propitiate, to atone for sin". According to scripture, the sacrifice required by the Law only covered the individual's sin making the sin offering and secured personal divine forgiveness. The Old Testament sacrifices never removed man's sin. "It is not possible...", Heb. 10:4. The Israelite's offering implied confession of sin in anticipation of Christ's sacrifice which did, finally, "put away" the sins "done previously in the forbearance of God". Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15, 26. The word "atonement" does not occur in the New Testament; the word in Rom. 5:11 is "reconciliation".

The beginning of the subject of propitiation is found far back in the Bible, back to the designing of the tabernacle in the wilderness, the tent which God had the people of Israel set up which would be the center of His presence on earth.

The tabernacle occupies a large portion of Scripture, sixteen chapters in the book of Exodus and the whole book of Leviticus. Every feature of

the tabernacle, of the worship carried out there, of the priestly life and duties, of the vestments of the priests, the sacrifices, the feast days--every feature was vitally important and designed by the Lord for eternal purposes. It is very important for the church age believer to have a good working knowledge of the Levitical system in order to appreciate fully the work of Christ and the plan of God as they have been instituted in the world.

There was great stress on the blueprint of the tabernacle.

Exodus 25:8, 9 "And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it."

The pattern was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, along with the Law. **Read Hebrews 8:1-6**. The tabernacle was a symbolical expression of spiritual truth. The congregation of the Jews did not go beyond the courtyard of the tabernacle. They made offerings only at the brazen altar; and only the priests were allowed to go anywhere else in the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the dwelling place of God on earth, and God was unapproachable by sinful men. The main lessons being taught had to do with the perfection of God and the sinfulness of man.

The Furniture of the Tabernacle

Brazen Altar -- This altar was the beginning of a person's approach to God. Animal sacrifices made there taught that substitutionary sacrifice is the first step toward fellowship with God. When a person passed outside the gate of the tabernacle, the only thing that he could see was the smoke rising from the burnt offerings, and through the one gate could be seen the altar of sacrifice and the blood being shed. Everything else was hidden from view by the curtain. This was a continuous reminder of "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." The only thing the unbeliever can ever see is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice for us.

A description of the brazen altar is found in Ex. 27:1-8 and Ex. 38:1-7.

The Laver -- Here the priests cleaned their hands and arms before performing any service or act of worship (Ex. 30:17-21). It was placed between the brazen altar and the tent of worship (the holy place). This cleansing symbolized the spiritual

cleansing which is essential to both worship and service.

The Candlesticks -- These illustrated the need for illumination, the light of the world. See Ex. 25:31-40; 37:17-24.

The Table of Bread -- An illustration of the need for spiritual food. See Ex. 25:23-30; 37:10-16.

The Altar of Incense -- From Ex. 30:1-10, this piece of tabernacle furniture illustrated the need for acceptable worship and prayer. No animals were offered on this altar. The offering was an incense offering, indicating that which is pleasing to God, divine good (gold, silver, and precious stones). The fire for the altar of incense came from the brazen altar, indicating that worship can only come after salvation. No strange fire was allowed; and Nadab and Abihu died for disobeying this rule.

The Veil -- The veil symbolized the barrier between God and man; only the high priest could enter the holy of holies, and that only once a year on the day of atonement, to offer the blood on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant.

The Ark of the Covenant -- The ark of the covenant was located in the holy of holies of the tabernacle. It was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. Its dimensions were 50 inches long by 30 inches wide by 30 inches deep. The ark was a picture of Christ bearing our sins, the box part representing Christ. The wood illustrated the humanity of Christ, the gold represented His deity.

Inside the ark were three objects representing sin (Num. 17:8, 10; Heb. 9:4). The tables of the Law represented sin in the sense of violation or transgression of God's order. The pot of manna represented rejection of God's provision. Aaron's rod represented revolt against God's authority.

Over the top of the box was a lid of solid gold, the mercy seat (or throne). Over each end of the mercy seat was a gold cherub, the highest ranking angel. The first cherub represented the absolute righteousness of God, and the second cherub represented the justice of God. Together they represented the holiness of God. The cherubs faced toward each other, wings outstretched towards each other, and looked down at the mercy seat. "Righteousness" looks down and condemns (Rom. 3:23). "Justice" looks down and assesses a penalty.

Once a year, on the day of atonement, the high priest went into the holy of holies twice; once to make atonement for his own sins, and then to do so for the people. He sprinkled blood from the sacrifice on the ark, on the top of the mercy seat, between the cherubs. This was a graphic illustration of God's grace provision for sin. "Righteousness" looks at the blood of the animal, which represents the spiritual death of Christ on the cross, His substitutionary atonement, and is satisfied. "Justice" looks at the blood and is satisfied that the penalty paid for sin was sufficient, teaching that Christ was judged and paid the penalty for us.

Therefore, the ark speaks of redemption - Christ paid for our sins, paid our ransom, to purchase us from the slave market of sin.

So we have in the ark and the mercy seat a picture of God's satisfaction with the work of Jesus Christ known as propitiation.

Now, the Hebrew word for mercy seat is **kapporeth**. The Greek word used in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament is **hilasterion**. This same Greek word is found in the New Testament in Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5; 1 John 2:2; and 4:10. and is translated "mercy seat" or "place of propitiation". So there is a direct relationship between the mercy seat in the tabernacle and the doctrine of propitiation.

Because of propitiation, God is free to love the believer without compromising either His righteousness or justice. The thought in the Old Testament sacrifices and in the New Testament fulfillment is that Christ completely satisfied the just demands of a holy God for judgment of sin.

Propitiation is not the placating of a vengeful God; but it is, rather, the satisfying of the righteousness of a holy God making it possible for Him to show mercy without compromise. Propitiation demonstrates the consistency of God's character in saving the worst sinners. Propitiation reconciles man to God. This means that sin is no longer the issued between man and God. The only issue, both for the Old Testament and New Testament believers, is "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." (Acts 16:31)

The Barrier

The word "barrier" has been coined by Bible teachers (it is not a Bible word) to refer to those

characteristics of man and of God which cause man to be alienated from God. The barrier, as described in six parts below, represents mankind's need to be reconciled to God by God's grace provision.

1. Every person has a retroactive "position" in Adam. Because Adam died spiritually, every person is born spiritually dead. Read 1 Cor. 15:22 and Eph. 2:5, 6.

This problem is solved by God's offering to us a "position" in Christ, a condition which forms the basis for the doctrines related to positional truth. Read 1 John 5:11, 12; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 1:7.

2. Man's physical birth places him in a condemned human race: 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:5, 6.

This problem is solved by God's allowing us to become members of His family through regeneration: John 1:11, 12; 3:3 ff; Gal. 3:26; Titus 3:5.

3. God's perfect character, His glory, His perfect essence, disallows imperfection of any kind. Example: The Ten Commandments. Read Rom. 3:23; Gal. 3:22, 23; Ps. 145:17.

But the death of Christ on the cross paid the penalty for our sin. He was our propitiation. Propitiation is "the work of the Lord Jesus Christ by which He appeases the wrath of God and conciliates Him who would otherwise be offended by our sin." Read 1 John 2:2; Rom. 3:25.

4. Man's personal righteousness falls short of God's perfect righteousness: Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10-12; Rom. 5:6-11.

This problem is solved in two ways. First, by justification, "God's act of grace by which He pardons the sinner and accepts him as righteous on account of the atonement of Christ." Read Rom. 3:24; 5:1. Then, by imputation, "the act of God by which He credits human sin to Christ in order that He

may in turn credit righteousness to men." Read Rom. 3:22; 2 Cor. 5:21.

5. Man's personal sin causes him to fall short on a day by day basis: Rom. 3:23. This problem is solved by redemption, by which man is purchased from the slave market of sin and set free as a citizen of the heavenly kingdom: John 8:31-36; Eph. 1:7.
6. Man stands under the penalty of sin: Rom. 6:23; 5:12.

The penalty for sin was paid by Jesus Christ on the cross. This is known as expiation, a blotting out of sin: Col. 2:14.

The barrier is removed and man is free to approach God. God is free to treat man in grace. God's righteousness and justice are satisfied. The complete penalty has been paid.

There is no double jeopardy for sins committed. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." Therefore, the only issue to be faced by any person is whether he believes in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. Read Acts 16:30; John 3:15-17, 36; 5:24.

Grace Notes is a ministry of Austin Bible Church, Austin, Texas

<http://www.austinbiblechurch.com>

For an index of topics, or information about regular Bible studies, write to:

Warren Doud

Grace Notes

1705 Aggie Lane

Austin, Texas 78757

E-Mail: wdoud@gracenotes.info

URL: <http://www.gracenotes.info>

There is no charge for Grace Notes materials. The work is supported by Christians who pray for the ministry and share in the expenses.