

Big Words of the Cross, 3

1 John 2:1, 2

“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins . . .”
(1 John 2:2).

“PROPITIATION”

The big word “propitiation” is one we have a hard time spelling and often mispronounce. This word presents a difficult concept because heathen practices have tarnished the concept. Pagan idols were portrayed as having childish whims that had to be appeased. In Jesus’ time “propitiation” referred to appeasing the anger of an idol by making a blood sacrifice.

God does not have moods; He is above having hurt feelings. He created a salvation by which He could forgive mankind and remain just in His dealings with sin. Jesus provided this propitiation through His personal sacrifice. In a sense, God bore our punishment! In this way, He can be just and still save sinners.

Man must be righteous, but he cannot create righteousness because of his sinfulness. It is of God, but God cannot “just confer it” on sinners. Neither can sinners pay back, bribe, or impress God with lavish gifts. Jesus became the final, perfect sacrifice for us. He took upon Himself first our flesh, then our sin. He is *both* our sacrifice and

our High Priest (Hebrews 2:14–18). He is *both* our Lord and our Savior (Acts 2:36). He is our vicarious sacrifice—the fulfillment of all Jewish sacrifices. He was not made guilty; He was made to be sin as our substitute for our sin (2 Corinthians 5:17–21).

Propitiation enforces the enormity of sin. Love without wrath is sentimentality. Divine grace satisfied divine wrath by a divine self-sacrifice.

“EXPIATION”

The New Testament says it is impossible for sinners to save themselves. Only Christianity has the Savior, Jesus.

Propitiation (with reconciliation as a result) is made possible by expiation (the act of making atonement). Propitiation and expiation are so intertwined that it is difficult to separate them. You expiate a sin, but you propitiate a person. Expiation is a doctrinal truth; propitiation is a personal application of a doctrinal truth. Expiation is the removal of guilt; propitiation is the removal of the divine wrath that has come because of the sin.

Jesus is our “mercy seat” (Romans 3:25, 26). Our righteousness is a faith-righteousness that comes through Christ. The blood of Jesus is our expiatory sacrifice. The cross is where the sin of man is judged. To expiate is to pay the penalty, the price (1 John 2:1, 2); to propitiate is to satisfy the justice of God. We were bought with a price, and a righteous God has declared us righteous through our faith in Jesus. We are declared forgiven because Jesus paid the price for our sin (see Hebrews 2:17, 18; 1 John 4:9–11).

Jesus is our “Passover” (1 Corinthians 5:7). He covered our sins, allowing God to put them behind His back (see Isaiah 38:17).

God did not stand apart from the cross in petulant anger. He involved Himself in our plight. In Christ, He took the penalty of our sins upon Himself—not in mechanical substitution, but in profoundly personal love. God cannot and will not forgive and accept us except through the cross.

“IMPUTATION”

The idea of imputed righteousness is profound yet simple. Sinful man cannot be righteous; therefore, imputed righteousness is the only kind of righteousness he can have. Justification has been called “the supreme paradox of the gospel.” Through forgiveness, God makes sinners just, or righteous (Romans 8:1, 2).

Imputation is an accounting term which refers to another’s riches being placed into my account. Our sins are imputed to Christ, and, as Paul said, we receive “the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Philippians 3:9; see Isaiah 53:5, 6, 10, 11; Romans 4:11; 14:9; 1 Peter 2:24). Read and reread Philippians 3:7–11. We would prefer to merit grace, but grace cannot be merited! Burton Coffman well said, “Nothing that man could ever do in a million years of righteous living could ever earn the tiniest fraction of the salvation God gives to men in Christ.”¹ Furthermore, imputed righteousness eliminates human pride. The only meritorious work in salvation is the cross.

“RANSOM”

The best-known and most misunderstood facet of atonement is “ransom.” A ransom is the purchase price

¹James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Romans* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1973), 122.

for freeing slaves, and sinners are the slaves of sin. God forever silenced Satan at the cross (Matthew 20:28; Galatians 3:13; 1 Timothy 2:5, 6; Titus 2:14, 15), where the blood of the Lamb was given to redeem us. What Satan thought was his greatest victory was his final defeat! Jesus died for us—as a price for our sin and a substitute for our death. He did not die as a martyr for a cause, but He freely gave His life as a ransom for us. Jesus made sin forgivable and man savable. Hallelujah, our Redeemer lives!

To whom was this ransom paid? God did not buy sinners back from Satan. God does not negotiate with anyone! We are “sold under sin” (Romans 7:14; NKJV), but we are not sold to Satan. God, not Satan, was satisfied at the cross (1 John 2:1, 2). Satan is the “accuser” (Revelation 12:9, 10). God cannot be holy without punishing sin. The penalty for sin had to be paid.

Neither was the ransom paid to society. Society has no law or court to deal with sin. The ransom was paid in order to satisfy the justice and holiness of God. Upon being ransomed, the debtor is totally owned. A ransom is satisfaction for the insult of sin. The penalty of law (Romans 6:23) is paid, and its sanctity is vindicated. The ransom reveals the seriousness of sin. Salvation is given to us as a gift when we believe and obey the gospel. Jesus not only dethroned Satan, but He also dealt with sin. In overcoming sin, Jesus overcame death. The sin-debt is unpayable except through the marvel of His grace.

The redeemed must not forget what redemption is!

*The cross . . .
there is no other way!*