

Chapter Twenty-eight
Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans
The Propitiation of God

“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*” (Hebrews 10:10). “IT IS FINISHED!” (John 19:30)

“But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12). “IT IS FINISHED!” (John 19:30)

“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). “IT IS FINISHED!” (John 19:30)

“Now where remission of these *is, there is no more offering for sin*” (Hebrews 10:18). “IT IS FINISHED!” (John 19:30)

“²⁶ For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. ²⁸ He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: ²⁹ Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:26-29)?

“²¹ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed *{historical present ; having been witnessed too}* by the law and the prophets; ²² Even the righteousness of God *which is by faith {the fidelity, faithfulness}* of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵ Whom God hath set forth *{to expose to public view; used of the bodies of the dead}* to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission *{the passing over}* of sins that are past *{lit; past sins}*, through the forbearance of God;” (Romans 3:21-25).

The doctrine of propitiation is one of those truths that run deep. It is a meaty doctrine of great importance. When Paul addresses the doctrine of propitiation in Romans 3:25 it cannot be separated from what is said in Romans 3:23. Integral to the N. T. doctrine of propitiation is all the teaching of the O. T. involving the Mercy Seat of the O. T. Tabernacle. Paul is drawing all of this O. T. symbolism to reflect upon the finished work of Christ as the only and once for all vindication of God’s righteousness and satisfaction of His just penalty for sin.

God’s presence in the O. T. Tabernacle was over the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant contained the two tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written with the finger of God. This is important to understand. It also contained a pot of Manna from the wilderness (typical of Christ) and Aaron’s rod that budded. The Ark and its cover (the Mercy Seat) together made up the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant was the first holy vessel to be made for the Tabernacle. It was the only item placed in the Holy of Holies. When Jehovah’s presence was with Israel, He dwelt over the Mercy Seat. It was here, over the Mercy Seat, that God revealed His glory in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The whole of the Tabernacle, the Priesthood, the sacrifices and all else was built around the Ark of the Covenant.

The details for the Ark and the Mercy Seat are recorded in Exodus 25:10-22. Together with the Cherubim, they represent the eternal Throne of God in Heaven.

“¹⁰ And they shall make an ark *of shittim wood*: two cubits and a half *shall be* the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof. ¹¹ And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about. ¹² And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put *them* in the four corners thereof; and two rings *shall be* in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it. ¹³ And thou shalt make staves *of shittim wood*, and overlay them with gold. ¹⁴ And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them. ¹⁵ The staves shall be in the rings of the ark: they shall not be taken from it. ¹⁶ And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee. ¹⁷ And thou shalt make a mercy seat *of pure gold*: two cubits and a half *shall be* the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof. ¹⁸ And thou shalt make two cherubims *of gold, of beaten work* shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. ¹⁹ And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: *even* of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. ²⁰ And the cherubims shall stretch forth *their* wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces *shall look* one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be. ²¹ And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. ²² And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which *are* upon the ark of the testimony, of all *things* which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel” (Exodus 25:10-22).

The purpose of the Cherubim in the understanding of Romans 3:23

A number of O. T. Scriptures relating the purpose of the Cherubim are directly related with the glory of God. The Cherubim (with the Mercy Seat) were beaten from pure gold (a symbol of the righteousness of God). The whole setup of the Old Testament Tabernacle centered around the Ark of the Covenant as a physical picture of the real Throne of God in Heaven. The Heavenly Throne of God is revealed in considerable detail in both Old Testament and New Testament prophecies. The Cherubim are spoken of often regarding the Throne of God.

“And before the throne *there was* a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, *were* four beasts full of eyes before and behind” (Revelation 4:6).

“And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8).

“And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever” (Revelation 15:7).

The central purpose of the Cherubim is the vindication of God’s righteousness. The lid of the Ark was the Mercy Seat in that it covered the broken Law from the eyes of the Cherubim. Why is that necessary?

“⁷ And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, ⁸ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: ⁹ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (II Thessalonians 1:7-9).

The sprinkled blood covered the Old Covenant believer's sins from the eyes of the Cherubim. At the Mercy Seat God would meet with His redeemed.

“And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which *are* upon the ark of the testimony, of all *things* which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel” (Exodus 25:22).

Christ is our propitiation because His sacrifice on Calvary was where God met sin head on and once for all paid its penalty.

“²⁶ For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away {*athetesis*, ath-et'-ay-sis: the cancellation; i.e., the condemnation of} sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷ And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: ²⁸ So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:26-28).

This is the reason why I object to the use of the word *Atonement* to refer to the Cross-work of Christ and the doctrine of salvation. Atonement is a Covenant Theological interpretation (not a translation) of the Hebrew word *kaphar* (kaw-far'), which literally means to cover with pitch. Under the Old Covenant, the believer's sins were *covered over* (the lid of the Ark of the Covenant was called the *Kapharith*). Covenant Theologians, failing to see a dispensational transition from Law to grace, adapted the continual sacrifices of Israel to the Church Age. Under this application, God was only appeased (this was the pagan understanding of satisfying the anger or wrath of the gods). That is how Covenant Theologians view the Old Covenant sacrifices (totally in error).

Upon the completion of the work of redemption through the Cross-work of Jesus Christ, sins were no longer *covered over*. God was propitiated. Christ bore the death sentence that was upon every sin ever committed by mankind, from Adam to the last man on earth. Because God was propitiated, His righteousness (justice) was satisfied and the repentant sinner was completely removed from the condemnation of his sins through the Blood of Jesus Christ “once” and for all.

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (I Peter 3:18).

“¹ 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” (I John 2:1-2).

Christ Jesus is our Mercy Seat where the redeemed meet with God for communion and fellowship. The book of Hebrews refers to the Mercy Seat as a Throne of Grace.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

The Law is the revelation of God's righteousness. The Cross is the revelation of His love. In the sacrifice of Christ, God reconciled those two aspects of His character and was propitiated. This is the backdrop for Paul's statements in Romans 3:21-25.

Jesus is the “righteousness of God” (Romans 3:21).

Under the Judgment/Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant was the broken Law. The Law is a revelation of God’s righteousness. However, Jesus is the righteousness of God embodied. The intent here is that God would provide righteousness on the grounds of the right doing of Jesus Christ rather than the right doing of the believer.

Because no man can keep the Law, God has appointed Jesus as the substitute man Who fulfills the Law for us. Therefore in Jesus’ fulfillment of the Law, He became the mediator between God and Man restoring the broken Law to its rightful state as He becomes the new Federal Head of mankind before God.

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Matthew 5:17).

This is as intricate an aspect of propitiation and justification as the sacrifice for sin.

“17 Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 18 And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. 20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. 21 For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

Because God is propitiated, all that trust in the Cross work of Jesus Christ and confess Him as Lord are completely and once for all removed from the realm of condemnation, death, darkness and wrath of God and are “born again” into the realm of salvation, life, light and the eternal blessings of God’s grace.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24).

However, those who reject the propitiatory work of Christ will continue in their condemnation to ultimately receive the “wrath of God.”

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

“⁴ Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? ⁵ But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; ⁶ Who will render to every man according to his deeds: ⁷ To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: ⁸ But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, ⁹ Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; ¹⁰ But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: ¹¹ For there is no respect of persons with God” (Romans 2:4-10).

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1. Discuss Luther's deficiency regarding his return to *Sola Scriptura*. _____

2. Discuss the main failure of the Reformation (actually the so called Reformers) regarding a "finished" work of redemption and why that failure continues to be a major problem among Protestant Churches today. _____

3. Read Hebrews 10:10, 12, 14, 18 and 26-29 with John 10:30. What is your conclusion regarding the main failure of the Reformers from your answer to the above question and what truth do they need to UNDERSTAND (Matthew 13:23)? _____

4. Read Exodus 25:10-22. Discuss the Soteriological (doctrine of salvation) significance of God's presence being over the Ark of the Covenant. _____

5. Read II Thessalonians 1:7-9. Detail the theological significance of the Cherubim on the Judgment/Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant. _____

6. Explain the doctrine of propitiation and why understanding it is critical to believing the gospel and being saved. _____

7. The Law is the revelation of God's righteousness. The Cross is the Revelation of God's love. Discuss how the doctrine of the propitiation of God reconciles these to seemingly theological paradoxes. _____

8. Discuss why the word *Atonement* (as used by Covenant and Reformed Theologians) is a misrepresentation of the Cross-work of Jesus Christ. _____

9. Read Matthew 5:17 and II Corinthians 5:17-21. Discuss why understanding and believing in the sinlessness of Christ is a critical truth regarding the doctrine of propitiation and your salvation. _____

10. Read John 5:24. Discuss why the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer is *anchored* to an understanding of the doctrine of propitiation. _____
