

Propitiation

A Big Word To Describe A Great Accomplishment



Introduction

We are planning to show in this Bible study how the very essence and uniqueness of the Gospel Of Jesus Christ hinges upon the biblical meaning of the word **propitiation**. It is a word that defines the meaning and scope of Christ's atonement. And Christ's atonement for sinful mankind is as effective as God says it is and as wide in scope as He says it is. So I believe a thorough study of the word propitiation as used in sacred Scripture will shed lots of light on a Gospel that is not very clearly taught nor preached today.

Many professing Christians, primarily those in "free will" churches, believe that Jesus died for everyone. But even though that may sound "OK" at first to those who have been sitting under that brand of preaching for a long time, it is a very wrong idea, based perhaps on very superficial bible study or based upon the understanding of preachers who may be full of "knowledge" from their apostate Bible college but in whom the Spirit of God does not dwell. If Jesus died for everyone, then nobody *can* go to Hell. All their sins are paid for... Payment for sin and deliverance from Hell is precisely what Christ's death accomplished. That is the essence of **propitiation**. God's wrath against sinners was appeased, divine justice was satisfied, completely, for ALL the sins of ALL the people for whom Christ died. The Bible does not let us get away with saying "Jesus died for everybody but some go to Hell because they did not accept Christ as their Savior". All whom God saves WILL accept Christ as their SAVIOR.... AND as their MEDIATOR... AND as their LORD... AND as their GOD... AND as their HIGH PRIEST... AND as their ADVOCATE... AND as their ALL IN ALL! But God has to first CONVERT the spiritually dead sinner before that rebel and God hater accepts anything that is from the Spirit of Truth. Many preachers will say that Jesus' death on the cross made salvation possible or that it opened the door to Heaven and now "all you gotta do" is believe. However, a correct understanding of propitiation does not allow one to reach such a conclusion. And it is this lack of understanding of propitiation that has brought about so much bad teaching regarding salvation through Jesus Christ.

First let's take a look at how Bible dictionaries define this word:

Easton's Bible Dictionary Definition Of Propitiation:

"That by which God ... consistent with his character and government [can justly] **pardon** and bless the sinner. In 1 John 2:2; 4:10, Christ is called the "propitiation for our sins." Christ is "the propitiation," because by his becoming our substitute and assuming our obligations **he expiated our guilt, covered it**, by the vicarious punishment which he endured."

The propitiatory sacrifice of Christ on the cross PURCHASED the COMPLETE AND UNCONDITIONAL PARDON of those for whom Christ died. Christ cannot completely cover our guilt, our sin, and yet we are still guilty before God. Therefore, if Christ died for ALL then none CAN go to Hell because atonement would have been made for ALL. But such is not the case. Jesus often told people that many will be going into the wide gate of destruction. Who then are those who will be going into the wide gate of destruction? Those for whom Christ has NOT made atonement, for whom He did not suffer for. Hence, they will have to atone for their sins themselves, which they will do by spending eternity in Hell - God's wrath HAS either been poured out on Christ - for His elect bride OR God's wrath WILL BE poured out on the unredeemed sinner in Hell.

Please note the word "PARDON" in the definition above. Christ obtained our PARDON by what He did on the cross. His suffering and death ACCOMPLISHED our FULL PARDON at Calvary. It did not simply "make possible" our pardon if and only if we would eventually say "yes" to Jesus or eventually "believe in" Jesus. We are COMPLETELY at the mercy of GOD regarding salvation, even to the point of NEEDING GOD TO REGENERATE US so that we would be willing and able to say "yes" to Jesus and so that we would believe in the real Jesus, a Jesus we could never know without regeneration - without the Holy Spirit already dwelling within us! Now do you understand the DEPTH AND SCOPE of YOU being completely at God's MERCY, lest you should end up in the Lake of Fire for the just punishment for your sins???

Noah Webster's Dictionary Definition Of Propitiation:

"1. The act of appeasing the wrath and conciliating the favor of an offended person.
2. Atonement or atoning sacrifice; specifically, the influence or effects of the death of Christ in appeasing the divine justice, and conciliating the divine favor."

If Christ's propitiatory sacrifice APPEASED the wrath of God, which is what the apostle John is stating in 1John 2:2 (as quoted below), and if that sacrifice met the terms of divine justice, then who can dare say that anyone would end up in Hell if indeed the expression "the whole world" refers to every single soul who ever lived or died. Therefore, the expression CANNOT mean everyone. It has to be referring to a "group of people" - consisting of BOTH the Jewish world and the Gentile world as we will see below.

New Testament References To The Word Propitiation

Here are the three places in the New Testament where the Bible references the word propitiation:

Romans 3:25 - "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

1John 4:10 - "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

1John 2:2 - "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

When we look at the last of the 3 verses above, it sure looks like Jesus died for everyone, since 1John 2:2 says that Jesus is the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for "the whole world".

In order to understand any phrase or expression in the Bible, we need to make sure that our interpretation **does not go against other statements and doctrines** taught in the Bible. We cannot just ASSUME we know what a phrase or term is referring to. And we must remember that the Bible is full of figures of speech not meant to be taken 100% literally all the time. **Since a completely literal interpretation of 1John 2:2 would go against other statements in the Bible** that strongly and clearly declare that Jesus only died for *His elect bride, His sheep*, and *His people*, then **we must further investigate word meanings** in verses like 1John 2:2. In this case, we will look at the research and findings of great Bible scholars John Gill and Matthew Henry. Both of these men were Bible scholars with few equals. The Church during their time (and since) recognized their profound knowledge of the scriptures and the original languages. I am not saying that we need to run out and consult scholars about every Bible passage we wish to study but we should realize that God has provided teachers to the body of Christ to provide us with insight into some of our studies of scripture. We must ALWAYS be cautious about which scholars we consult, and so we should research their backgrounds to see what other mature believers in the body of Christ have to say about those scholars so that we might be forewarned of any doctrinal errors in the theology of the ones with whom we seek to consult.

First we will investigate the research done by John Gill...

John Gill's Commentary Of The Bible - Regarding 1 John 2:2 -

John Gill was no ordinary run-of-the-mill Bible teacher. He was a Bible scholar in a class far above the rest. Here he comments on 1 John 2:2 to clarify the expression "the whole world". As always, Mr. Gill is quite thorough in his analysis of this passage of scripture:

1 John 2, verse 2 - "And he is the propitiation for our sins" - For the sins of us who now believe, and are Jews:
and not for ours only; but for the sins of Old Testament saints, and of those who shall hereafter believe in Christ, and of the Gentiles also, signified in the next clause:

"but also for [the sins] of the whole world" - the Syriac version renders it, "not for us only, but also for the whole world"; that is, not for the Jews only, for John was a Jew, and so were those he wrote unto, but for the Gentiles also. Nothing is more common in Jewish writings than to call the Gentiles, "the world"; and "the whole world"; and "the nations of the world" ... and stands opposed to a notion the Jews have of the Gentiles, that "there is no propitiation for them" ...

so this phrase, "all the world," or "the whole world," in Scripture, unless when it signifies the whole universe, or the habitable earth, is always used in a limited sense, either for the Roman empire, or the churches of Christ in the world, or believers, or the present inhabitants of the world, or a part of them only. ...

And so it is in this epistle (as seen later in 1John 5:19) where "the whole world lying in wickedness" is manifestly distinguished from the saints, who are of God, and belong not to the world; and therefore cannot be understood of all the individuals in the world; and the like distinction is in this text itself, for "the sins of the whole world" are opposed to "our sins," the sins of the apostle and others to whom he joins himself; who therefore belonged not to, nor were a part of the whole world, for whose sins Christ is a propitiation as for theirs.

So that this passage cannot furnish out any argument for universal redemption; for besides these things, it may be further observed, that for whose sins Christ is a propitiation, their sins are atoned for and pardoned, and their persons justified from all sin, and so shall certainly be glorified, **which is not true of the whole world, and every man and woman in it;**

Next we will look at Matthew Henry's commentary of 1John 2:2. While not as thorough as John Gill's, it does *qualify* the term "whole world".

Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary Of The Bible - Regarding 1 John 2:2 -

Matthew Henry first describes propitiation:

1John 2:2 - By the plea he has to make, the ground and basis of his advocacy: And he is the propitiation for our sins. He is the **expiatory** victim, the propitiatory sacrifice that has been offered to the Judge for **all our offences** against his majesty, and law, and government.

Next Matthew Henry addresses the scope of that propitiation:

By the extent of his plea, the latitude of his propitiation. It is not confined to one nation; and not particularly to the ancient Israel of God: He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only (**not only for the sins of us Jews**, us that are Abraham's seed according to the flesh), **but also for those of the whole world** (#1John 2:2); not only for the past, or us present believers, but for the sins of all who shall hereafter believe on him or come to God through him. The extent and intent of the Mediator's death reach to **all tribes, nations, and countries**.

Christ's propitiatory sacrifice is not confined to one nation; and not particularly to the ancient Israel of God... but ...for the sins of ALL who shall hereafter believe on Him. And that is the precise SCOPE of Christ's atonement, but nothing further.

By looking deeper at what was said in 1John2:2 we find that the phrase "whole world" means what John the apostle intended it to mean (in particular to those to whom he originally addressed his epistle) and not what many a biased preacher wants it to mean. **It means that Christ's propitiation (his atoning sacrifice) was not just for the Jews but for "the whole world" - meaning "every nation"**. John's point being that Jesus' atonement was also for Gentiles, not just for Jews as many Jews at that time had thought concerning the Messiah.

Why so many pastors and Bible teachers do not draw the correct conclusion about whom Christ died for only confirms the biblical truth regarding God's discretion as to whom He decides to reveal things to:

Matthew 11:25 - "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

If you understand these biblical doctrines correctly, remind yourself that is only by God's grace alone that such is the case. Amen?

A Strongly Related Word: Redeemed

When we examine the word "redeemed" which God uses throughout the Bible

to refer to His people and to refer to what Christ ACCOMPLISHED for those people, we begin to see that Jesus did not just make salvation AVAILABLE or POSSIBLE, but that He in fact BOUGHT salvation for His sheep, His people, His bride and so on.

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not **redeemed** with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” [1Peter 1:18-19]

“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast **redeemed** us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” [Revelation 5:9]

Man's Part In Salvation: “Believing”... Oh Really?

The bible does talk a lot about **believing in Christ** but that does not mean the lost sinner exercises his or her “free will” to believe in Christ in order to BECOME saved. Rather, believing in Christ – rightly believing in Christ – is the FRUIT of salvation and a MARK of a found sheep. So, believing in Christ is actually the result of an ACT OF GOD – regeneration by the HOLY SPIRIT – and so **that Spirit** within true “believers” allows them to KNOW God and allows them to believe in the true Christ and to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

“For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.” [1Corinthians 2:11]

The idea that God did His part in salvation and now you have to do your part (in order to become saved) by believing in Christ – of your own “free-will” – is simply a false doctrine that assumes things that are not true, namely:

1. that we are not spiritually dead, so we should be ABLE TO COME to Christ (able to believe in Him as if we already had the Holy Spirit in us), which is a false premise.

2. that we are not as bad as God says we are (see Romans 3:11 & Romans 8:7-8 for example), so we could actually WANT TO COME to Christ even before God regenerates us, which is not possible for those who are spiritually blind, deaf, dumb, lame and in rebellion against the Almighty.

Did you have to believe anything in order to be born? Or did you simply realize you were born because you were in fact brought into this world by God as a conscious, thinking human being? You had to become a living spirit first,

as with the first Adam when God created him in the garden of Eden. Did Lazarus in chapter 11 of the Gospel of John have to believe anything in order to be resurrected from the dead by Jesus Christ? Or did he simply realize he had been resurrected once Christ brought him back from the dead? As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:7 "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?". —
RM Kane
