

Series: Romans
Title: Christ a Propitiation
Text: Romans 3: 25
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Romans 3:25: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood,...

The word “propitiation” is the mercy seat. The mercy seat was the same dimensions as the ark of the testimony. It exactly covered the law which was in the ark. It was upon the mercy seat that the high priest sprinkled the blood of the lamb on the day of atonement. It was there at the mercy seat where God promised to meet with his people.

Exodus 25:17: And thou shalt make a mercy seat (a propitiation) 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. [the law of God] 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.

ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

The spotless lamb was brought—a picture of Christ Jesus the spotless, just Substitute provided by God. In type, the sin of the children of Israel was transferred to the lamb—a picture of Christ being made sin and bearing all the iniquity of his people. Then justice slew the lamb instead of the children of Israel—a type of Christ crucified in place of all God’s elect. Then the high priest, by himself, took the blood of lamb into the holiest of holies—a picture of Christ our High Priest entering God’s presence with his own blood. The high priest sprinkled the blood upon the mercy seat—propitiation. God said, “*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.*”

The propitiation is the sacrifice by which God’s wrath is appeased. It is the sacrifice by which God’s injured honor, due to sinner’s breaking his law, is vindicated. In that one sacrifice justice has been satisfied and God’s law upheld. Atonement—at-one-ment between God and his people—has been made. God is propitiated.

Sinner, do you ask, “How can I come before God? Where will God meet with me, the sinner?” God says, “*There, I will meet with thee and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat.*” And who is that mercy seat? Who is that propitiation?

Proposition: In our text, God declares he has provided a propitiation in the person of Christ, his dear Son.

WHO PROVIDED THE PROPITIATION

Romans 3:25: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation...

The very God who was offended, the very God whose law we broke, the very God who was angered at the dishonor shown him by his chosen people, is the God who provided the propitiation! Concerning his people we read,

1 John 4:9: In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 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.

God's love for his elect is eternal and immutable. He never hated those he everlastingly loves in Christ. God always loved his elect. His love never changes. He does not love today and hate tomorrow nor hate today and love tomorrow. God's love never varies. It never increases and never diminishes.

So Christ has not, by his sacrifice and death, procured the love and favor of God toward us. It was the love of God who sent Christ who is the propitiation for the sins of God's elect people. And by Christ's sin-atonement sacrifice at Calvary, Christ removed all the obstacles between God and his people.

Therefore, seeing that God himself provided the propitiation, it must be safe to believe God's word. Seeing God who we offended provided his own Son to propitiate God for the sins of his people then we know that God really will meet with a sinner and commune with a sinner in Christ the propitiation. If the one I offended provided his Son to be a propitiation and God declares Christ is the only one in whom he will meet with a sinner then I should come to God through faith in Christ.

WHEN DID GOD SET HIM FORTH?

Romans 3: 25: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation

The margin says whom God "foreordained." God ordained Christ a propitiation before the world was made. In God's eternal purpose and decree, God the Father chose and ordained his Son, Christ our Lord, a propitiation for the sins of God's elect. Before as yet Adam sinned and plunged all God's elect into sin and death, God had already ordained his Son, a propitiation for our sins.

Then God set Christ forth a propitiation in the promises of the Old Testament. Way back in the garden in Genesis 3: 15, God set Christ forth as the woman's seed who God promised would bruise the serpent's head. God set him forth in all the types, shadows, and sacrifices of the law. We saw Christ typified as the High Priest, the Lamb, and the Mercy Seat. Likewise, in the prophets, God set Christ forth a propitiation. Isaiah 53 is concerning Christ our propitiation.

Micah 5: 2: But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting.

Proverbs 8:23 [Christ our Wisdom says] I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

Of course, God set Christ forth in our nature in the incarnation when the Son of God took flesh like unto his brethren. He was manifest in his life of obedience as our Surety, in his sacrifice upon the cursed tree and in the preaching of the gospel. At the appointed hour, God sets Christ forth a propitiation in the hearts of his people. The apostle Peter summed all this up by saying to those born of the Spirit that Christ "*verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.*" (1 Pet 1: 20)

The point I want you to get is that the Lord Jesus Christ was not "plan B" with God. God the Father set forth Christ a propitiation from before the foundation of the world. God elected a people he would save and God foreordained Christ a propitiation for our sins. It means God knew the end from the beginning. God has been in full sovereign control since the beginning of time. The fall of Adam's race was no surprise to God. Before sin entered God had already foreordained the propitiation for sin. The crucifixion of Christ by the hands of wicked men was the fulfillment of what God ordained before the world was made. In God's eternal purpose there has always only been one Propitiation, Christ Jesus the Lord. Isaac Watts wrote:

"Christ be my first elect he said
Then chose our souls in Christ our Head
Before he gave the mountains birth
Or laid foundations for the earth

Thus did eternal love begin
To raise us up from death and sin
Our characters were then decreed
Blameless in him, a holy seed.”

A PROPITIATION BY HIS BLOOD

Romans 3: 25: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation...in his blood,

This is the main point. Christ propitiated God by shedding his own life’s blood unto death.

Hebrews 9: 11: But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; 12: Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*.

God’s holy law was broken by Adam and all his elect sinned in him.

Romans 5: 12: Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that [in Adam] all have sinned:

Then to show us that we all really sinned in Adam when he sinned, and that we were all really made sin by Adam’s disobedience, the Holy Spirit declares that God will not impute sin unless a man has been made sin by a prior act under the law.

Romans 5: 13: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

Words have meaning. We do not have the luxury of defining words as we please. The Greek Lexicon declares that “*if I reckon [or impute] that my bank book has \$25 in it, it has \$25 in it. Otherwise I am deceiving myself. This word refers to facts not suppositions.*” Right here in verse 13, the Holy Spirit declares that God will not impute sin where a man has not first been made sin under law.

Romans 5: 14: Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression,...

How could God be just to impute sin to men who did not break a known law after the similitude of Adam? The reason God imputed sin to men and death reigned between Adam and Moses, even though they did not have a known law to break after the similitude of Adam, is because in Adam all really and truly have sinned. (Ro 5: 12-13) That is the point of verses 13-14. We were made sin by one man’s disobedience. Therefore, God justly imputed sin to us because it was fact. He is telling us the reason God imputed sin to us is because in Adam all *have* sinned.

Brethren, I would never make this statement to you if I had not studied it very diligently throughout the scriptures and by looking up the definitions of these important words. When the definition says that imputation does not deal in suppositions, it means God did not suppose or treat Adam “as if” he had sinned when Adam broke his law. Nor did God treat all Adam’s race “as if” we sinned in Adam. When the definition says imputation deals in facts it means God imputed sin to Adam because he was made sin by a prior act under the law. The prior act was Adam, himself, sinned. So God imputed sin to us because “*all have sinned*” in Adam (Rom 5: 12) Adam made us sin by his disobedience just as scripture says. Therefore, because we were made sin by that prior act under the law, God justly imputed sin to us.

Thankfully, Romans 5: 14 says that Adam “*is the figure of him that was to come.*” Adam typified Christ in that Christ is the legal and seminal head of his people just as Adam was of his. When the definition of imputation says imputation does not deal in suppositions, it means God did not impute sin to Christ and treat Christ “as if” he were sin. God would not impute sin to Christ until “*he hath made him sin for us, who knew no sin.*” When the Greek Lexicon says imputation deals in fact it means when “*he hath made him sin for us, who knew no sin*” then and only

then did God impute sin to Christ when he was “*numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*” (2 Cor 5:21; Is 53: 12)

It does not mean Christ was corrupted or himself became a sinner. Christ himself knew no sin: he was not conceived in sin, he did no sin nor would he commit sin. The Psalms are clear that even while Christ bore the sin of his people and cried “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*”, he vindicated God as pouring out his wrath justly when he said “*But thou art holy...but I am a worm, and no man.*” (Ps 22: 1-6) By calling himself a “worm” our Redeemer was owning the sin and shame of his people to be his own. But at the same time, in perfect faith and holiness of heart, Christ never ceased looking to, crying unto and waiting upon God his Father to justify him when the work was finished according to his Father’s covenant promise. (Is 50: 6-9) We see it in the same Psalm when Christ said, “*But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother’s belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.*” (Ps 22: 9-11) So Christ fulfilled the positive righteousness of the law in perfect holy faith as he fulfilled the negative righteousness of the law by bearing the death of separation from God which is the wages of sin. (2 Thess 1: 9) No, in no way did Christ become a rebellious, God-hating, law-breaker. In no way was he corrupted in his nature. Perish the thought! Sin was not infused into Christ. But because God will not impute sin where one has not been made sin under law by a prior act, whether we understand how or not, scripture is clear that the prior act was “*he hath made him sin for us, who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*” (2 Cor 5:21)

Someone will object that God made Christ sin by imputing the sin of his people to Christ. But if definitions mean anything then that simply cannot be according to every true definition and true use of imputation. It runs contrary to the use of imputation in every form of the word throughout the scriptures. Imputation is charging someone with the fact of what they are, not supposing them to be something they are not. If a bad motive is imputed to someone whose motive is honest, it is a false charge. But imputing a bad motive to someone does not make the person have a bad motive. Imputation, when done justly, is reckoning to one what is fact. That is simply the definition of imputation and it is the scriptural use.

Oh, what good news this is for the believer! Since God does not deal in suppositions, God is not treating the believer “as if” we are righteous or “as if” we do not have sin. When the definition says imputation deals in fact it means through faith in Christ, God imputes righteousness unto the believer because Christ really made God’s elect righteous by his obedience. That is exactly what the scripture says. Likewise, it means God will not impute sin to us because by the finished work of Christ we have no sin to impute. Again, that is exactly what scripture says. “*And ye know that he was manifested to put away our sins; and in him is no sin.*” (1 Jn 1: 5)

Brethren, we simply do not have the luxury of making words mean what we want them to mean. Words mean what they mean. Bless God, imputation is the imputing of what a man has been made by a prior act. Christ came to manifest the strict, unyielding, unbending righteousness of God. In order to manifest the righteousness God, God could not and would not deal in supposition, pretending “as if.” Rather, God dealt in fact, manifesting that he is the God of all the earth who only does right!

We broke God’s law in Adam and God’s offended justice had to be satisfied because God is just. Therefore, God cannot arbitrarily put away sin and discharge the sinner of his guilt apart from the blood of his Son upon the cross. A holy and just God demands satisfaction for sin before he can receive sinners into fellowship with himself. Therefore, he declares that “*without shedding of blood there is no remission for sin.*”

So only by Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice can God be just and yet justify the ungodly. But by the blood of Christ our propitiation the Holy Lord God is both, “a Just God and a Savior!” Christ’s sacrifice has upheld God’s holy law. And Christ’s blood has satisfied justice for each one for whom he died making us justified by God our Justifier!

Now, oh how I love to think on this! Now, that same justice means God must and shall be merciful to all for whom Christ died. The wrath of God, nor any of the effects of his wrath, can ever fall upon those for whom Christ is the propitiation. So in the blood of Christ propitiation has been made.

I love the picture God drew for us in the old tabernacle. The mercy seat in the holiest of holies was the exact size to cover the law of God inside the ark. Christ said, “*Thy law is in my heart. I came to do thy will, o God!*” By his submission and obedience to the law, Christ perfectly fulfilled every requirement of the law’s righteousness to its exact size. By voluntarily submitting himself to the curse of the law in the stead of his people, Christ fully satisfied the demands of the law’s justice. “*For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*” (Ro 5:19)

Hebrews 9:25: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; 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 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.

1 John 2: 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.

THROUGH FAITH IN HIS BLOOD

Romans 5: 25: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood,...

You and I need Christ—we need to believe on Christ—because we are guilty sinners and God is holy and will by no means clear the guilty.

Therefore, the only way God will meet with us, the only way holy God *can* meet with us, and commune with us, is by us coming to him in the one and only propitiation that he has provided, the only and only propitiation wherein he will meet with us, his own Son.

If you are to be saved from the guilt of sin and the curse of the law, you must renounce all self-worth and all self-righteousness and trust Christ as your only propitiation. Christ is the propitiation for sinners of every kind but only for those who come to God by him—*through faith in him!* Remember, what Christ said of the publican:

Luke 18:13: And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful [propitious] to me a sinner. 14: I tell you, this man went down to his house justified...

Jeremiah 50:20: In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve.

Amen!