



## Propitiation

Propitiation means to satisfy, to appease wrath, to atone for sin, or to conciliate an offending person and comes from the Greek word ἱλαστήριον (hilastērion) found in Romans 3:25-26 and 1 John 2:2.

Propitiation means that the perfect righteousness (+R) of God the Father was satisfied with the perfect work of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

*"whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:25-26, NASB)*

*"and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." (1 John 2:2, NASB)*

By the work of Jesus Christ, man is reconciled when they respond by faith belief in the work of Jesus Christ. The sins of the entire human race, past, present, and future were borne by Jesus Christ on the Cross and judged by God the Father. Thus, sin is no longer the issue. The issue is either rejection or belief in the substitutionary spiritual death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

At the moment of salvation, when we each received Jesus Christ as our personal Savior by faith, God the Holy Spirit placed each of us permanently into union with Christ. Based on this, God the Father could then impute or convey His perfect righteousness to each and every one of us. Rom. 3:25-26. This is because the justice of God must judge sinful man before the justice of God can be free to bless man. Therefore, this imputation of God's very own perfect righteousness, given to believers in the Church Age, is the target for all of God's blessings that He set aside for us in eternity past. Romans 3:25-26 also says that Jesus Christ was publicly displayed as the propitiation of God's justice.

Jesus Christ is the unique God-man. He is perfect and sinless humanity and was therefore, qualified to be the sin bearer for the entire human race. Jesus Christ is also the second person of the Trinity - God the Son - who created and continues to sustain the entire universe by the word of His power. Heb. 1:3; Heb. 1:10; Col. 1:16-18.

*"And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," (Hebrews 1:3, NASB)*

*"And, 'YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;" (Hebrews 1:10, NASB)*

*"For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." (Colossians 1:16-18, NASB)*

God is perfect and absolute in every way. God possesses eternal, unchangeable, and perfect righteousness. Therefore, God rejects all relative standards of righteousness such as man's righteousness or good deeds performed to gain salvation. Psalms 145:17; Rom. 3:23; Isaiah 64:6.



*"The LORD is righteous in all His ways And kind in all His deeds." (Psalms 145:17, NASB)*

*"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (Romans 3:23, NASB)*

*"For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away." (Isaiah 64:6, NASB)*

God also possesses eternal, unchangeable, and perfect justice. God's perfect justice is administered from His perfect righteousness. It is impossible for God to be unfair in the function of divine justice. These two characteristics of God form His holiness or integrity. Deut. 32:4.

*""The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He." (Deuteronomy 32:4, NASB)*

Propitiation is the work of Jesus Christ in salvation related to God in that the justice of God the Father was satisfied with the sacrificial ministry of our Lord on the Cross. In propitiation, the justice of God judged our sins and was satisfied with that judgment. Propitiation is also related to the love of God. The love of God was the motivation for propitiation. 1 John 4:10.

*"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10, NASB)*

Perfect God can have contact only with perfect righteousness and justice. Therefore, unsaved mankind can never attain perfect righteousness or justice, no matter what they do on their own. Being moral and nice to others will not achieve it. Nothing we can do on our own can achieve it. However, through the simple act of faith alone in Christ alone, anyone can receive God's perfect righteousness at salvation because of the substitutionary spiritual death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. His perfect work satisfied or propitiated the perfect righteousness and justice of God the Father.

Propitiation means satisfaction in that God's perfect essence was made compatible with mankind through the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. God the Father was and always will be satisfied with the perfect work of God the Son on the Cross. Jesus Christ was perfect and sinless humanity and was therefore, qualified to be the sin bearer for the entire human race. This principle means that the salvation work of Jesus Christ atoned or paid the penalty for all mankind which is called unlimited atonement. Jesus Christ also remained perfect and without sin in His humanity while He was being judged for our sins. 1 John 2:2; Rom. 3:25; 1 Peter 2:24.

*"and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." (1 John 2:2, NASB)*

*"whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;" (Romans 3:25, NASB)*

*"and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." (1 Peter 2:24, NASB)*

The imputation of perfect righteousness at salvation means instant justification for each believer. Because of this, God is justified in blessing us. He blesses us by keeping us alive and by providing unlimited opportunity to take in the Word of God and to grow in grace. Divine justice must judge sinful man before divine justice is free to bless sinful man. When the justice of God judged Christ on the Cross for our sins, both the righteousness and justice of God were propitiated. Now that same justice of God



can provide blessing without compromising any attribute of His perfect essence.

## **Old Testament Portrayals of Propitiation**

### The Mercy Seat

The Greek word for propitiation in Romans 3:25 and Hebrews 9:5 is ἱλαστήριον (hilastērion) and means a lid, a place of covering, or a mercy seat. This refers to the lid of the Ark of the Covenant which was made of pure gold. The mercy seat was located on the top of the Ark which was within the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. The Ark of the Covenant was a small wooden box approximately 2.5 cubits long (3.9 feet), 1.5 cubits wide (2.3 feet), and 1.5 cubits tall (2.3 feet) as stated in Exodus 25:23 and was made of acacia wood and covered on all sides with gold.

*"whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;" (Romans 3:25, NASB)*

*"and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail." (Hebrews 9:5, NASB)*

*""You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long and one cubit wide and one and a half cubits high." (Exodus 25:23, NASB)*

A cubit was a common unit of measurement in the Old Testament times measured from the tip of the adult male hand to the elbow which was about 18 inches on the average. The acacia wood represents the perfect sinless humanity of Jesus Christ with the gold representing the deity of Jesus Christ. Together, they are the unique God-man Jesus Christ and is called the Hypostatic Union of Jesus Christ. See category on [Jesus Christ, Hypostatic Union](#).

The Ark of the Covenant contained a golden jar or urn of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables or tablets of the covenant or Mosaic Law. These all represent the nation of Israel's rejection of God's grace provision. Heb. 9:4-5.

*"having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail." (Hebrews 9:4-5, NASB)*

The doctrine of Propitiation was communicated to the nation of Israel through the mercy seat foreshadowing what was to come. The two cherubs of gold represent the righteousness and justice of God. These two attributes of God's essence combined are called His holiness or integrity. The integrity of God is therefore, the point of reference between mankind and God. Exodus 25:17-22.

*""You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. "You shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. "Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. "The cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. "You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you. "There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel." (Exodus 25:17-22, NASB)*



As the two angels looked down on the mercy seat, they did not see the contents of the Ark, but the sacrificial blood sprinkled there by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. The mercy seat represented the presence of God. Lev. 16:2; Num. 7:89.

*"The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat." (Leviticus 16:2, NASB)*

*"Now when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim, so He spoke to him." (Numbers 7:89, NASB)*

### The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement in Old Testament times portrayed or foreshadowed propitiation and the salvation work of Jesus Christ which was to come. The sprinkling of animal blood represented the spiritual death of Christ bearing our sins and the acceptance of this work by the integrity of God. The burnt offering also portrays propitiation. In Leviticus 1:9, “burnt” is taken from the Hebrew verb עֹלָה (olah) meaning “to go up” and refers to the smoke from the offering going up to God. In Leviticus 1:9, “burnt” is the Hebrew noun קָרְבָּן (qorban) and means an offering by which you approach God. Today, Jesus Christ is the only way to approach God. Lev. 1:1-9.

*"Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock. 'If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. 'He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. 'He shall slay the young bull before the LORD; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 'He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces. 'The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. 'Then Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar. 'Its entrails, however, and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer up in smoke all of it on the altar for a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD." (Leviticus 1:1-9, NASB)*

The animal sacrificed had to be a “male without defect” and was a picture of the sinlessness or impeccability of the humanity of Jesus Christ. The brazen altar was located near the doorway of the Holy of Holies and was a picture of the Cross. The Levitical priest represented the people who had brought their sacrificial animal to him for their forgiveness based on the future work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. The priest would lay his hand on the head of the sacrificial animal as a picture of identification whereby the sins were transferred from the people to the animal. The physical death of the animal was a picture of the future substitutionary spiritual death of our Lord on the Cross.

The priest would then skin the animal to demonstrate that there was no blemish in the animal which was another picture of Christ’s perfect and sinless humanity. Cutting the animal into pieces portrays the salvation work of Christ. The fire on the brazen altar represented judgment. Burning the sacrifice is analogous to the fact that Jesus Christ, who knew no sin, was made sin as a substitute for us.

### The Grain Offering



The grain offering in Leviticus 2:1-3 illustrates propitiation. The fine flour represents the perfection of the humanity of Christ. God the Father gave the Son. Only a perfect gift can be given by God. The oil speaks of the Holy Spirit sustaining our Lord throughout His life and especially while paying the penalty for our sins on the Cross. Heb. 9:14.

*"Now when anyone presents a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour, and he shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it. He shall then bring it to Aaron's sons the priests; and shall take from it his handful of its fine flour and of its oil with all of its frankincense. And the priest shall offer it up in smoke as its memorial portion on the altar, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD. The remainder of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons: a thing most holy, of the offerings to the LORD by fire." (Leviticus 2:1-3, NASB)*

*"how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14, NASB)*

This was prophesied in Isaiah 11:1-3 and Isaiah 61:1-2. The sustaining ministry of God the Holy Spirit glorifying our Lord is now part of the heritage of all Church Age believers as He sustains us all through our spiritual lives.

*"Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear;" (Isaiah 11:1-3, NASB)*

*"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn," (Isaiah 61:1-2, NASB)*

The frankincense in Leviticus 2:1-3 refers to the sinless perfection of Jesus Christ propitiating God the Father which is the sweet aroma of the offering. The priest takes a handful of the fine flour which represents faith in Jesus Christ. An offering by fire represents the judgment of our sins. The brazen altar represents the Cross. God the Father finds only one offering satisfactory to provide eternal salvation and that is the substitutionary spiritual death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. Christ alone atoned for the sins of the human race. Fellowship with God during our lives here on the earth and in eternity is based on the fact that God the Father's justice was satisfied or propitiated by the person and work of Christ on the Cross. At the moment of our faith alone in Christ alone, we as believers are given God's very own righteousness because we are then placed permanently in union with Christ by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we share that propitiation of Christ.

### **Ritual as a Foreshadow of Christ's Work**

The justice of God can only judge the unbeliever who rejects the propitiation offered by the blood of Christ. In Leviticus 16:2, Aaron was commanded to never enter the Holy of Holies or else he would die. God's stern command to Aaron to never enter the Holy of Holies apart from the blood offered on the Day of Atonement illustrates that salvation by works cannot provide salvation - ever. The only day the High Priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies was on the Day of Atonement. He was commanded to enter only with the blood of the animal sacrifice as stated in Leviticus 16:13-16.





*"The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat." (Leviticus 16:2, NASB)*

*""He shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the ark of the testimony, otherwise he will die. "Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. "Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. "He shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities." (Leviticus 16:13-16, NASB)*

Propitiation is the only approach to the justice and righteousness of God. Numbers 7:89 shows that Moses was permitted inside the Holy of Holies to talk to God. He was the only exception. A relationship with the justice and righteousness of God is the only way to have contact with God. Moses had such a strong relationship with the integrity of God that God allowed him in His presence.

*"Now when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim, so He spoke to him." (Numbers 7:89, NASB)*

### **The Parable of the Tax Collector**

The parable of propitiation is found in Luke 18:9-14. Tax collectors were considered by the Jews to be the lowest of all social rank at that time.

*"And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." " (Luke 18:9-14, NASB)*

The Pharisee followed the Roman tax-collector into the temple in order to criticize him. The tax-collector was a believer and so asked God to be merciful to Him. He did not beg God to save him, but to be merciful or propitious to him. He did not ask for love and mercy which would exclude the propitiatory work of Christ on the Cross. In contrast, he had believed that Jesus Christ would perform His perfect work on the Cross and asked that the justice of God be satisfied with his faith in that work.

Propitiation is the basis for God being merciful and gracious to all of us. The Gentile Roman understood propitiation whereas the Jewish Pharisee did not. The Pharisee had ritual without reality. This parable indicates that God does not distinguish between races, nor is God propitiated by human works. Being humble in Luke 18:9-14 means approaching God without any form of human works for salvation. The Pharisee exalted himself and was not saved. The tax-collector did not and was saved by faith.