Propitiation

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*And He* [Jesus Christ] *is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*. ([1 John 2:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+2.2&t=NKJV))

*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](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+4.10&t=NKJV))

*Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith.* . . ([Romans 3:25a](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+3.25a&t=NKJV))

*Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people*. ([Hebrews 2:17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+2.17&t=NKJV))

*For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.* ([Hebrews 8:12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+8.12&t=NKJV))

*And above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.* ([Hebrews 9:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+9.5&t=NKJV))

*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 to me a sinner.* ([Luke 18:13](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Luke+18.13&t=NKJV))

The above passages embody the Greek words that convey the work of *propitiation* in the Greek New Testament. These Greek words are *hileos, hilasmos, hilaskomai*, and *hilasterion*; all of which convey the work of *propitiation*; and this work, which is complete and absolute (finished), was performed exclusively by Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary and is the most significant and marvelous work of God that demonstrates His unfathomable love for mankind.

The need for *propitiation* was due to the holy nature of God ([Exodus 15:11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+15.11&t=NKJV); [1 Samuel 6:20](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Samuel+6.20&t=NKJV); [Psalm 99:9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Psalm+99.9&t=NKJV); [Isaiah 6:3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Isaiah+6.3&t=NKJV); [Revelation 15:4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+15.4&t=NKJV)) on the one hand, and the sinful nature of man ([Romans 3:23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+3.23&t=NKJV); [11:32](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+11.32&t=NKJV); [Galatians 3:22](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Galatians+3.22&t=NKJV)) on the other. Because the first man (Adam) disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden and consequently experienced both immediate spiritual and eventual physical death, which were passed on to all his descendants down through time ([Romans 5:12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+5.12&t=NKJV)), there existed and continues to exist a *sin barrier* between God and man. God’s holiness was profoundly offended by man’s disobedience, which was and is the basis for this barrier between God and man. In order for the personal relationship to be restored between God and man, this barrier had to be removed and God’s holiness (His righteous demands incurred by man’s sin) *satisfied*—a feat completely and totally unachievable by man ([Ephesians 2:8-9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+2.8-9&t=NKJV); [Romans 3:20](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+3.20&t=NKJV); [11:6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+11.6&t=NKJV); [2 Timothy 1:9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Timothy+1.9&t=NKJV); [Titus 3:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Titus+3.5&t=NKJV)).

The sin of man, which is the barrier, required a penalty ([Genesis 2:17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+2.17&t=NKJV); [Romans 6:23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+6.23&t=NKJV)) to be paid—the penalty of both physical and spiritual death. And since man was and is unable to make this payment which would *satisfy* God’s holiness (His righteous demands due to sin) and would restore the spiritual relationship between God and man; God, in his enduring love for man, sent forth His *only begotten* (unique) Son to pay the price that only He was capable of paying and thereby bring *satisfaction* to (heal the offended nature of) God.

The core significance or meaning of the word, *propitiation*, is found in the English word, *satisfaction*. Propitiation, as used in the New Testament, clearly conveys that Christ’s work on Calvary, His spiritual death (separation from the Father) during the 6th to the 9th hour of darkness ([Matthew 27:45-46](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+27.45-46&t=NKJV); [Luke 23:44-45](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Luke+23.44-45&t=NKJV)) when He *was made to be sin* for mankind ([2 Corinthians 5:21](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Corinthians+5.21&t=NKJV)) and finally declared that it was *finished* or *payment has been made* ([John 19:30](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+19.30&t=NKJV)), did *fully satisfy* God’s holiness (His righteous demands due to man’s sin) and heal His offended nature.

Because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary’s hill, anyone may appropriate spiritual reconciliation (the restoration of spiritual union) with God through the sole means of faith exclusively in Christ and His completed work. This reconciliation, a product of the mercy ([Hebrews 8:12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+8.12&t=NKJV)) and love of God, is free (without cost on man’s part) to every human being that has ever and will ever live upon earth ([2 Corinthians 5:18-20](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Corinthians+5.18-20&t=NKJV); [1 John 2:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+2.2&t=NKJV)). This wondrous salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, is pictorially expressed by the Greek word *hilasterion* (the same word used for *propitiation* in [Romans 3:25](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+3.25&t=NKJV)) as *mercy seat* in [Hebrews 9:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+9.5&t=NKJV).

The *mercy seat* was the covering or lid on the “ark of the covenant,” which was located in the “holy of holies” within the tabernacle, the place where Yahweh (*I am the One who is*) dwelt within the midst of and met with His chosen people of Israel after the exodus from Egypt. It was made of acacia wood and covered with gold. On each end of it was positioned a gold cherubim (a type of angel). They stood and faced each other as described in [2 Chronicles 3:13](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Chronicles+3.13&t=NKJV). It was between these cherubim on *the mercy seat* that the *Shekinah* glory rested ([Exodus 25:22](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+25.22&t=NKJV)), a visible manifestation of Yahweh’s presence among His people. It was there where God would meet with the high priest (the representative of His chosen people Israel), but only with the blood of sacrifice. It was also known as the *place of propitiation*—the place where God and man could come together by means of an innocent sacrifice. The *mercy seat* therefore was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ who, through His own sacrifice on the cross, made it possible for man to eternally be reconciled back to God. Only through Christ may anyone receive reconciliation (spiritual union) with God and this only when it is appropriated *by faith alone in Christ alone*.

On the cross of Calvary Jesus Christ took the sins of the world (past, present and future) and became that sin. As a result of this He experienced a spiritual separation from the God the Father, which is totally beyond man’s understanding. This spiritual separation, painful beyond all human comprehension, was indeed the *payment* (punishment) Christ made for the sins of the world, which *satisfied* God’s righteous demands for man’s sin. Thusly, Jesus Christ became the *propitiation* (the One who satisfied God’s requirement) for sin and the One who tore down the *sin barrier* between God and man. All man needs to do is appropriate it *by faith alone in Christ alone*.

This writer/commentator cannot help but provide for the reader a brief commentary on the subject of *propitiation* by one of the greatest and most comprehensive Bible theologians of recent history, Lewis Sperry Chafer, D.D., Litt.D., Th.D., late President and Professor of Systematic Theology, Dallas Theological Seminary. His comments follow:

*Christ by having His own blood sprinkled, as it were, over His body at Golgotha, becomes the Mercy Seat in reality. He is the Propitiator and has made propitiation by so answering the just demands of God’s holiness against sin that heaven is rendered propitious. This fact of propitiation existing is to be believed. Certainly the adjustment is not to be asked for if it has already been accomplished. The flood-gates of divine mercy are open, the flow coming however only through that channel which Christ as Propitiator is.*

*Propitiation is the Godward side of the work of Christ on the cross. The death of Christ for the sin of the world changed the whole position of mankind in its relation to God, for He recognizes what Christ did in behalf of the world whether man enters into it or not. God is never said to be reconciled, but His attitude toward the world is altered when the world’s relation to Him becomes radically changed through the death of Christ.*

*God is propitious toward the unsaved and toward the sinning saint: “And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our’s only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (*[*1 John 2:2*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+2.2&t=NKJV)*). Attention should be called to the fact that God saves a sinner or restores a saint without striking a blow or even offering a word of criticism. It is too often supposed that human repentance and sorrow soften the heart of God and render Him propitious. This cannot be true. It is the legal fact that Christ has borne all sin which renders God propitious. The most determining truth to which all gospel preaching should be harmonized is that God is propitious; thus all the burden is taken off sinner or Christian, only leaving him to believe that through Christ’s bearing his sin God is propitious.*

*The publican went up to the temple to pray after having presented his sacrifice, which was the custom (*[*Luke 18:13*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Luke+18.13&t=NKJV)*). The Authorized Version reports him to have said: “God be merciful to me a sinner.” What he really prayed was (\*\*R.V. marg.): “God, be thou propitiated to me the sinner.” He did not ask for mercy as though he must persuade God to be propitious, but in full harmony with the relationship existing between the Old Testament covenant people and God, and on the ground of his offering or sacrifice, he did ask God to be propitious on that special basis. Such a prayer ever since Christ has died is wholly wrong. In the present age of grace one need not ask God merely to be merciful toward sin, for that He cannot be, and furthermore since Christ’s death has rendered God propitious there is no occasion even to ask God to be propitiated. In fact, to do so becomes rank unbelief and unbelief can save no one.*

*The mercy seat in the Old Testament could be made a “hilasterion” [mercy seat] by sacrifice (*[*Hebrews 9:5*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+9.5&t=NKJV)*), but the blood-sprinkled body of Christ on the cross has long ago become the mercy seat for the sinner once and for all. It is there accordingly that God in righteousness can meet the sinner with salvation and restore the saint to communion. The mercy seat becomes a perpetual throne of grace. What otherwise would be an awful judgment throne is changed to one of infinite mercy.* (Systematic Theology, Vol. 7, Kregel Publications, 1993)

In closing, it is important to note that God has been totally *satisfied*, that *propitiation* is an accomplished fact. It is not something that a person must beg or request God to do or be for him. It is already completed—*permanently finished*. Jesus, on the cross, did it! All a person may “do” in order to receive this satisfaction for the payment of his sins is to receive it by *faith*, that is, genuinely trust in or place one’s total confidence in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for payment of his debt of sin. And this dear reader, is an act of the will—an earnest and willful decision. It is not a prayer or an exercise of emotion. It is simply deciding to trust only in Jesus and His sacrifice for one’s salvation. Upon this decision, the person is instantly and forever saved. His decision to *place his trust in Jesus alone* is what appropriates for him eternal life. Nothing else can do it.

**\*\***”Or, with an interpretation”. On the word see note on [Ezra 4:18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ezra+4.18&t=NKJV). The rendering of the R.V. marg. is sometimes based on the erroneous supposition that the Jews had returned from Babylon speaking Chaldee or Aramaic, and that in consequence the Hebrew of ‘the Law’ had to be ‘interpreted’ in the sense of ‘translated.’