

Propitiation

Man must be reconciled to God's perfect standard; that is man must adjust (reconcile) to the His standard. That is the manward side of the equation. The Godward side is propitiation. The word "propitiate" means to appease or conciliate someone or something. The complaint God has against man must find satisfaction. The complaint is sin and God's perfect righteousness will not allow Him to simply wink at it and then forget about it. Perfect righteousness (+R) cannot have fellowship with man's waaayyy-less-than-perfect righteousness (-R). God's perfect righteousness demands satisfaction regarding man's sinfulness. That process is called "propitiation" and it means to gain or regain the favor or goodwill of someone or appease them. Christ is said to be the propitiator.

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

"Propitiation" is *hilasmos hil-as-mos*' in the Greek and means atonement or expiator. God's perfect righteousness is satisfied through what Christ did on the Cross—a perfect in every way substitute took upon Himself the sins of the world and was judged for them. We do not say God changes or becomes reconciled like we do for man, rather God anticipates and meets the needs of His own righteousness through Christ. Because of the Cross, God is able to show mercy to sinful man, but only when sinful man puts faith in what Christ did as a substitution for himself.

In the Old Testament, this issue was temporarily handled by the sprinkling of the sacrifice's blood on the Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant inside the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem (and in the Tabernacle before the Temple was built by Solomon).

It was temporary because the Levitical sacrificial process under the Law was merely a shadow or type for what was to come. The Law and its animal sacrifices could not save anyone (Ro 3:20; 8:3; Heb 10:4; 6), instead they pictured what would ultimately provide salvation—the Cross and Jesus Christ as our substitute on it as the perfect lamb of God (Heb 10:1; Gal 4:4-5; 1 Pet 2:24).

Under the Law, Israel was obligated to seek atonement for sin once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest made sacrifices for the sins of his nation and sprinkled the blood on the Mercy Seat. It was the only day of the year he could even enter the Holy of Holies without facing death. That act allowed God to “overlook” sin for one year. The blood on the Mercy Seat “covered” the sins of Israel and “hid” them from God’s view (figuratively speaking, of course). This was only a temporary measure that pointed to Christ (Heb 10:1-18) and had to be repeated again each year. It accomplished nothing permanent.

Let me clear up a possible misconception right now. Understand that the Mosaic Covenant (the Law) was given to the *nation* Israel, believer and unbeliever alike. It was a system for managing the entire nation. With the Covenant came a set of rules relating to three aspects of life in the nation Israel. The Law had three codices. It regulated moral behavior, relationships with their fellows and other nations, and how they were to relate to God—moral, social, and worship codes.

The Law was NEVER a system for the Israelite to find salvation. Salvation in the OT was just like for the Church—faith with a grace reciprocation by God. The Israelite “looked forward to the Cross” to the extent that its details had been revealed to them. They did not then have the historical event of the Cross and the NT doctrines we have today, so their perspective was limited to how much God had thus far revealed to them. We look back on the Cross today, but we have the advantage of the historical event and all the “mystery” doctrines of the NT.

That means there were Jews living in Israel (and elsewhere), and some were saved because they had been saved by faith just like Moses and Abraham. But there were also Jews who were not saved. The Law was for both types of Israelite. The unsaved were compelled to follow the terms of the Law Covenant just like their saved fellow Jews. The entire nation was under the terms of the Covenant. If they met the terms of the Covenant, they would be blessed. If they failed to meet the terms of the Covenant, they faced severe discipline up to and including being kicked out of the land (Deut 28).

Both the Law, during the Age of Israel, and the grace system we enjoy, during the Church Age, were/are systems for man to relate to God. The sacrifices specified under the Levitical System were for believer and unbeliever alike, the entire nation of Israel, and NOT related to salvation. While under the Law, and with no universal indwelling Holy Spirit to enable them to meet the covenant's terms, leaving them to human effort alone to meet its standards, their system of relating to God was a purely a works-based system. However, in the Church Age we have the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit of believers to guide and enable our relationship with God and our fellow man. Ours is a grace-based system and unlike the Law is limited to born again believers only.

Through the Levitical offerings, God was propitiated temporarily (one year) concerning the Israelite's sins. However, we in the Church Age can boldly approach the throne of God and confess our sins (Heb 4:16; 1 John 1:9).

In the New Testament, Christ having His own blood sprinkled, as it were, over His own body at Golgotha becomes the Mercy Seat. Christ, as the propitiator, answered the just demands of God's righteousness. What He did changed the whole position of mankind in its relation to God whether man enters into it or not. Sin was finally dealt with at the Cross. There was no longer a need to "cover" the sins again with any further animal sacrifices (Heb 10:10-14). The sacrifices of animals never actually solved the sin problem, anyway, but the sacrifice of Christ did, and that changed the way God was able to view fallen man both in the past tense of "save" and the present tense of "save". God is never said to be reconciled, but His attitude toward the world was altered when the world's relation to Him becomes radically changed through the death of Christ.

"The floodgates of divine mercy are open..." is the way Louis Chafer puts it in his series on systematic theology.

It is often thought by the doctrinally ignorant that God's heart is softened by human repentance and sorrow, but nothing could be further from the truth. God's heart is softened ONLY by what Christ did on the behalf of mankind on the Cross. Because of that, God is justified and able to show mercy where none is otherwise deserved.

In Luke 18:13 the publican approaches the Temple to pray, which was the custom. He says, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” which is the way the KJV translates it. The word translated “merciful” is *hilaskomai hil-as'-kom-ahēe*, which means be propitious and should be translated as such. He did not ask for mercy, rather he asked that God be propitiated based on his offering, which was totally in harmony with the conditions of a covenanted people under the Law before the Cross. Mercy would come out of propitiation.

Some 2,000 years past the Cross we would not pray that today. Propitiation is an established fact and has been since the Cross. While it was appropriate for the publican back then, it is wholly wrong for the Christian to pray that today. Christ’s death has already rendered God propitiated. To ask for that becomes nothing less than unbelief and an offense to God.

Before the Cross, the Israelite under the Law met God at the Mercy Seat over the Ark in the Holy of Holies. After the Cross the Christian under Grace meets God at the Cross where Christ, the propitiator, died for our sins. In that act, God’s perfect righteousness was satisfied when the demanded penalty for sin—death—was paid by a totally innocent sacrifice taking the sinner’s place on the Cross.

Forgiven

1 John 2:12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake.

The idea of the forgiveness of sins is directly related to propitiation, which is God’s perfect righteousness (+R) being satisfied, concerning the sins of mankind through Christ’s substitutionary death on the Cross. Through the process of God’s perfect righteousness being satisfied (propitiated), as “children” of God, believers experience the forgiveness that our Heavenly Father grants to His own.

Even though the term is used in Scripture, technically sins are not “forgiven”. “Forgiven” implies that the believer’s sins are simply forgotten,

and while that may be what the believer in effect experiences, the sins were not simply forgotten.

Someone else paid the price demanded for those sins, and that price is death. Jesus the Christ went to the Cross in our place, and our sins were given (imputed) to Him who knew no sin, and those sins were not simply forgotten but were judged by God's perfect righteousness. That judgment satisfied the righteousness of God (propitiation). It is the believer's faith in that through which he finds what amounts to "forgiveness" for his sins.

Imputation

"Impute" in the Greek is an accounting term and means to reckon of charge to one's account. Paul uses it that in Philemon 1:18 where he says if Onesimus owes Philemon a debt he should put it on Paul's account. I find two words in the new Testament translated "impute" One is the word in Philemon, *ellogeo el-log-eh'-o* and *logizomai log-id'-zom-ahee* and both are from the same root word. Both mean to reckon to one's account.

There are two kinds of imputations in Scripture: real and judicial. A real imputation is when one is "reckoned" with what was antecedently his own, and a judicial imputation is when one is "reckoned" with what was not antecedently his own. In this context, "real" means you get charged with something that rightfully belongs to you, and "judicial" means you get charged with something that really belonged to someone else.

There are three imputations in Scripture, and we will briefly look at all three. Though all three have application to our subject in some way, our focus will be on number 3.

Number 1 – Adam's sin is imputed to the whole human race. The passage that covers this is Romans 5:12-21. It declares that the death sentence rests upon all humans because of what Adam did.

Verse 12 ... so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.... "That all have sinned" is in the aorist tense and means it is a completed past action. This does not refer to personal sin. It is a real imputation because it

rightfully belongs to each of us by way of our relationship with Adam, the federal head of the human race, and our sin nature that resulted from the fall. It is our sin nature to which the sin of Adam is imputed.

This means man is born already condemned. Why is that significant? You must be condemned to something before you can be saved from it. Condemnation must precede salvation. The earliest a child is able to grasp the concept of faith in Christ for salvation is generally thought to be around nine or ten. Yes there are exceptions that would include a younger age, and many that would not be able to make that decision until much older, and still others, due to some mental impairment, perhaps not ever. If we were condemned on the basis of only our personal sins, and children have certainly sinned at a young age (lying, anger, manipulation, stealing, to name a few), that would leave a huge period of time in that child's life prior to that point where he would have no hope of salvation. Furthermore, what of those born mentally incapable of ever accepting Christ or even understanding the need for that? They certainly willfully or unknowingly sin. Without the imputation of Adam's sin at birth, neither could go to heaven if they died in infancy or anytime before they accepted Christ. This is called the doctrine of the age of accountability. Until a person reaches accountability (is able to make a decision for Christ and has been given the opportunity to do so, if ever) God is free to save them on the basis they have been condemned and never had a chance to accept Christ.

King David understood this clearly as seen in 2 Sam 12:15-23 when the child of the Bathsheba affair dies. On his face, David prayed and fasted for seven days that God would deliver his sick child, but the child died as part of the discipline for David's sins. After the child died, he got up off the floor, bathed and dressed, went to worship at the temple, then sat down to a fine meal. His servants were baffled by this seemingly contrary behavior. David explained in v23, "But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me." David knew his own eternal status (saved by faith) and knew his child was in heaven and he would eventually join him there.

The child was condemned on the basis of Adam's sin, and God was free to deliver him because he had not reached accountability. Yes, personal sins

are also an issue, but they are merely added onto Adam's sin, and Christ died for all sins at the Cross (1 John 2:2).

Number 2 – Sin imputed to Jesus Christ. Interestingly, the word “impute” is not used but is captured in terms like “made him to be sin,” “laid on him,” or “bare our sins”. This is a judicial imputation in that sin is not part of His nature. He never sinned and He was not imputed with Adam's sin because He did not have a sin nature. He did not have a sin nature because He had no human father. Jesus' father was the Holy Spirit, and the sin nature is passed down through the father. (How that works is another study.) This imputation is mentioned in Isaiah 53:5-6, 11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; and 1 Peter 2:24. Our sins were laid upon Christ, and He was judged in our place.

Number 3 – The righteousness of God is imputed to the believer. This judicial imputation constitutes the believer's standing and acceptance before God. It is the only righteousness that God ever accepts. That is because it is His own personal righteousness. We say that God's righteous is perfect and abbreviate that with the term “+R”. We say man's righteousness can never measure up to God's and thus label it as “-R”. +R can never be satisfied by -R. +R can have nothing to do with -R.

The Book of Romans deals with this imputation, and since the purpose of the Romans epistle is to reveal the truth concerning salvation, it stands to reason that the imputation of the righteousness of God is an important part of that.

The phrase used, “the righteousness of God” (Ro 1:17; 3:22; 10:3), means the righteousness *from* God and not merely that God is righteous. Romans 3:10 declares that none are righteous (-R) in the sight of God (+R). Man cannot make himself righteous enough to satisfy God's perfect righteousness, therefore imputed +R righteousness is the only hope of mankind.

Paul states that he himself is not righteous but has the righteousness of (from) God (Phil. 3:9).

Phil 3:8 ... For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him,

not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but **that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—**

2 Cor 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him **we might become the righteousness of God.**

Second Corinthians 5:21 declares that Christ was made “*to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” There you have Imputations numbers 2 and 3 in one verse.

1 Corinthians 1:30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption

This passage declares it is because of what Christ did on the Cross that we can be declared righteous.

Rom 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was **counted to him as righteousness.**” ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, **his faith is counted as righteousness,** ⁶ just as David also speaks of **the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works**

Romans 4:3 declares that “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” That is he was imputed (credited) with +R. And verse 6 says, “...David also speaks of the blessedness of the man, unto whom God counts (imputes) righteousness (+R) without works,” The rest of chapter 4 goes on to expand on the subject of imputed righteousness and how it is attained through faith!

It is this imputed righteousness, a judicial imputation, something reckoned to someone who does not otherwise own it, which allows God to view fallen man in a favorable light. Man receives that righteousness, God’s own, on the basis of what Christ did on the Cross in our place and the believer’s trust in the sufficiency of that to solve the sin problem and our alienation

from God. God loves His own righteousness and thus is able to demonstrate His personal love for believers in possession of +R.

If you have trusted Christ as your savior, then the very righteousness of Christ has been given to you—credited to your account in heaven just like was done for Abraham, Rahab, David and other believers who trusted God. It is a gift given freely to those who believe. You cannot earn it.

So fallen man has been reconciled, and God's issue with fallen man has been propitiated, all because of what Christ did on the Cross. And when a fallen man trusts in that his account in heaven is credited with the righteousness of the One who stood in our place on the Cross and took our sins upon His own body.

As you can see it is not by our righteousness, which are "filthy rags" (Isa 64:6), but the righteousness of Christ (+R) imputed to the believer that establishes our acceptable credentials before the Judge.

Justification

We have established that there is an issue between God and man, and that is Adam's sin with our own sins heaped on top. Man has a sinful nature as a result of the fall (knowledge of sin), and that leads to further sin on the part of each individual. Man is said to be reconciled and God is propitiated when man demonstrates faith toward what Christ did on the Cross. That led to the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer. On that basis God is able to justify the believer.

Throughout the ages man has tried to put a definition on justification. We understand the end result is fallen man, by virtue of his possession of the righteousness of Christ, is effectively forgiven the sin of Adam and any he may have committed personally. The famous *Westminster Short Catechism* may have captured that idea the best when it said, "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, and received by faith alone."

As we have previously noted, technically, there is no Biblical basis for this concept of a divine pardon for our sins. Yes, the Scriptures say we are “forgiven,” but forgiveness implies a pardon—that the sins are simply overlooked, but that isn’t actually the case. God cannot simply “forgive” (overlook) sin; His justice demands He judge and punish it. Sin must be dealt with judicially, and that was the Cross. Someone had to face the ultimate consequences of our sins. Someone had to pay the death penalty for our sins. Fortunately, it wasn’t us. Jesus Christ went to the Cross in our place and took the penalty we should have taken. Our deliverance from the fires of hell depends on whether or not we put our faith and trust in that.

Justification is not the same as forgiveness. To forgive implies something is taken away, but justification has nothing to do with a pardon or forgiveness. To forgive means subtraction, while justify means addition. Justification is a declaration by God that the Christian has been made forever right and acceptable to Himself. For this to be true there must be an unalterable reality upon which it rests.

Ro 3:24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Ro 3:28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Ro 5:9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

That would be the past tense of saved—positional sanctification.

Ro 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Ro 8:33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Note that it is God who does all of this. Look at verse 33 "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifies."

And note also that the fact of being justified results in your ultimate glorification (v30). But that glorification is stated in the Greek constative aorists as so certain as if it is already consummated, though it is actually still in the future in the fullest sense. If you are justified, and all born again believers are, this WILL result in the believer ultimately being glorified—**no exceptions are allowed for in the passage.**

Clearly, this is a sovereign act of God and, as such, is irreversible and unchangeable since the ground, which it rests upon, is also unchangeable and secure. Here is another official argument for eternal security: **Because it is a sovereign act of God, justification cannot be reversed.** You were justified at salvation and it is declared in the Greek to have continuing results that will **absolutely** end in glorification.

Rom 8:33 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Who will bring any charge (*enkalesei*, "make a formal accusation in court; press charges"; cf. Acts 19:40; 23:29; 26:2) **against those whom God has chosen?** Satan is identified as "the accuser" of God's people (Rev. 12:10; cf. Zech. 3:1). His accusations are valid, because they are based on the believer's sinfulness and defilement. **But** Satan's accusations will be thrown out of court, because **it is God who justifies.** The Judge Himself declares the accused person righteous on the basis of his faith in Jesus

Christ (Rom. 3:24; 5:1). As a result all accusations are dismissed and **no one can bring an accusation that will stand.**

Regeneration

Tit 3:5 Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost

“Regeneration” is paliggenesia *pal-ing-ghen-es-ee'-ah*, which is one of those compound Greek words made up of two others, palin *pal'-in*, which means once more or again, and genesis *ghen'-es-is*, which means source, origin, or birth—a re-birth or new birth, if you prefer.

We see this same concept in the following verses:

Joh 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Joh 3:7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be **born again**.

1Pe 1:23 Being **born again**, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

That term “born again” is made of the two Greek words gennao *ghen-nah'-o*, which means to be born, and anothēn *an'-o-then*, which means from above, again, from the beginning, the very first, the top. “Born again” is an acceptable translation, though I believe a better and more literal translation would be “birth from above”. The reason I say that is because the source of this “birth from above” is heavenly, the Holy Spirit (John 3:6; Tit 3:5).

So, we have a “birth from above” and the agent of that is the Holy Spirit. This regeneration or new birth is mentioned in numerous New Testament passages (1 Pet 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:29, 4:7, 5:1, and 4).

Not only is this divine regeneration mentioned specifically in Scripture, but the results of this process are also mentioned. Believers are pictured in Scripture as children or sons and daughters of God (Gal 3:26; 4:5-6; John 1:12-13; Ro 8:14-17; 2 Cor 6:18; Eph 1:15; 5:1; Php 2:15; Heb 2:10-15; 1 John 3:1-2; and Rev 21:7). We will look at this later in our study.

Clearly, what we have is some form of miraculous birth whose origin is found in the Holy Spirit. It is separate and apart from the natural birth we experience when we pop out of our birth mother's womb. Furthermore, this new birth is not a figurative or metaphorical birth; it is a real one. Something that did not exist before does exist after—a functioning human spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh and what is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6).

Have you noticed this birth is similar to the generative process of the birth of Jesus? He had no human father. Instead, His Father was God, and it was the Spirit of God that miraculously impregnated Mary. While regeneration is only a spirit generation (Jesus' was both spirit and flesh), it parallels the generation and birth of Jesus. In both situations it is the Holy Spirit that is the agent of generation. And what is born is divine in nature since its source is divine.

What we have is a birth and that birth is the human spirit of the believer. Its generative source is the Holy Spirit. Its causative effect is faith in Christ (John 1:12-13; Gal 3:26)