

Of Propitiation, Atonement, and Reconciliation, as Ascribed to Christ.

by John Gill

The sermon explores the concepts of propitiation, atonement, and reconciliation as essential aspects of Christ's work for humanity's salvation.

Scripture: Zechariah 13:7, John 3:16, Romans 3:25, Romans 5:8, Romans 5:10, 2 Corinthians 5:18, Ephesians 2:16, Colossians 1:20-22, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:2

Topics: "Atonement", "Reconciliation"

Description

John Gill expounds on the concepts of propitiation, atonement, and reconciliation as they relate to Christ, emphasizing that while the term 'satisfaction' is not explicitly used in Scripture, its essence is captured in these terms. He explains that Christ serves as the propitiation for our sins, satisfying God's justice and reconciling humanity to Him through His sacrificial death. Gill highlights that reconciliation is initiated by God and accomplished through Christ, who intercedes on behalf of sinners, transforming them from enemies to friends of God. The sermon underscores the necessity of Christ's sacrifice for the restoration of the relationship between God and humanity, illustrating the profound implications of His atoning work. Ultimately, Gill affirms that reconciliation is not about changing God's love but about addressing the justice that sin demands.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 6--Chapter 6

OF PROPITIATION, ATONEMENT, AND RECONCILIATION, AS ASCRIBED TO CHRIST

Having observed, that though the word "satisfaction" is not syllabically used in scripture, when the doctrine of Christ's satisfaction is spoken of; yet that there are words and terms equivalent to it, and synonymous with it; as "propitiation, atonement", and "reconciliation": it may be proper to explain these terms, and give the sense of them; which may serve the more to clear and confirm the doctrine of satisfaction; and to begin, 1. First, with "Propitiation": the first time we meet with this word, and as applied to Christ, is in Romans 3:25.

"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation"; either to be the author of propitiation; for whose sake, and on account of what he was to do and suffer, God would be propitious to men--his justice be appeased--and he be at peace with them; laying aside all marks of displeasure, anger, and resentment against them: for this was Christ's work as Mediator; he drew nigh to God, and treated with him about terms of peace, and entered into measures of peace with him; interposed between justice and them, became a Mediator between God and man, to bring them together; hence he has the names of Shiloh, the Prince of peace, the Man the Peace, and Jesus our peace, who has made both one: or else to be the propitiatory sacrifice for sin; such hilastic, propitiatory, and expiatory sacrifices there were under the law; typical of the expiatory and propitiatory sacrifice of Christ; and as God in them smelled a sweet savor of rest, as types of Christ; so his sacrifice was an offering of a sweet smelling savor to him; he was well pleased with it, it gave him content and satisfaction, because his justice was appeased by it, and the demands of his law were answered, yea, it was magnified and made honorable; the word used in the above text *ilasthrion*, is the same which the Greek version of Exodus 25:21 and which the apostle, in Hebrews 9:5 use of the mercy seat; which, with the cherubim upon it, and the ark, with the law therein under it, to which it was a lid or cover, formed a seat for the divine Majesty; and which was an emblem of his mercy and justice shining in the atonement made by Christ, which this exhibited to view; and gave encouragement to draw nigh to this mercy seat, or throne of grace, in hope of finding grace and mercy, and enjoying communion with God: a glimpse of this the poor publican had, when he said, "God be merciful", *ilasqhti*, "propitious, to me a sinner!" or be merciful to me, through the propitiation of the Messiah.

Now Christ was "set forth" to be the propitiation in the purposes and decrees of God, *proegeto*, God "foreordained" him, as he was foreordained to be the Lamb slain, as the ransom price and propitiatory sacrifice; whose sufferings and death, which were the sacrifice, were according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (1 Pet. 1:19; Acts 2:23; 4:28), and he was set forth in the promises and prophecies spoken of by all the holy prophets that were from the beginning of the world; as the seed of the woman that should bruise the serpents head, destroy him and his works, among which this is a principal one, making an end of sin, by a complete atonement for it; and he was set forth as such in the types and shadows of the law, the trespass offerings, and sin offerings, which are said to bear the sins of the congregation, and to make atonement for them; which were typical of Christ, who was made an offering for sin, bore the sins of many, and made atonement for them (Lev. 10:17), and he has been set forth, in the fulness of time, in the exhibition of him, in human nature, in which he was manifested to take away sin; and he has put it away, and even abolished it, by the propitiatory sacrifice of himself; and he is still set forth in the gospel, as the sin bearing and sin atoning Saviour who has satisfied law and justice, and made peace by the blood of his cross; and therefore it is called the word of reconciliation, the gospel of peace, and the word preaching peace by Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

There are two other places where Christ is spoken of as *ilasmov*, the "propitiation"; and these are in the first epistle of the apostle John; in one of them (1 John 4:10), it is said, "God sent his Son to be the propitiation of our sins"; that is, sent him in human nature, to offer up soul and body as a sacrifice, and thereby make expiation of sin, and full atonement for it; and in the other it is said (1 John 2:9). "And he is the propitiation for our sins", the sins both of Jews and Gentiles; for which he is become a propitiatory sacrifice; upon which God is "merciful", *ilewv*, "propitious" to his people, notwithstanding all their "unrighteousness, sins, and transgressions", or is "pacified towards them for all that they have done" (Heb. 8:12; Ezek. 16:63). 2.

Secondly, the word atonement, though often used in the Old Testament, of typical sacrifices, making expiation of sin; as in Leviticus 1:4; 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:6, 10, 13, 16, 18; 16:6, 10, 11, 16-18, 27, 30, 32-34; 17:11 where the word *kaphar* is used, which signifies to "cover"; and Christ, by his sacrifice, the antitype of these, is a covering to his people, from the curses of the law they have broken--from the wrath of God they have deserved--and from avenging justice their sins exposed them to.

Yet it is but once used in the New Testament (Rom. 5:11). "By whom we have received the atonement" made for them by Christ their surety, head, and representative; that is, the benefit of it, the application of it by the Spirit of God, who takes the blood, righteousness, and sacrifice of Christ, and applies to his people, and shows them their interest therein; the effect of which is joy, peace, and comfort. The word used properly signifies "reconciliation"; and so it is elsewhere translated; and the Hebrew word *kipper* is sometimes rendered to "reconcile" (Lev. 6:30), atonement and reconciliation for sin, design the same thing, and both satisfaction for it.

Which leads to observe, 3. Thirdly, that the word "reconciliation" is frequently used with respect to this doctrine. Reconciliation began with God himself; "All things are of God", originally, in nature, providence, and grace; particularly this, "Who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 5:18). It began in the thoughts of his heart, which were thoughts of peace; it was brought into council and settled in covenant, called the council and covenant of peace. It was carried into execution by Christ, who is frequently represented as the author of it, by his death, and the blood of his cross (Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20-22), and it was made unto God, against whom sin is committed, whose law is broken, and his justice offended; and who is the Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy (Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:16), and it is a reconciliation for sin, to make atonement for it (Dan. 9:24; Heb 2:17), and of sinners and enemies in their minds to God (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21), which may be further illustrated, 3a.

First, by observing the character of the persons reconciled; which will show the cause, reason, and necessity of a reconciliation to be made; they are "enemies"; and in one of the texts referred to, they are said to be "enemies in their minds by wicked works": which is expressive, 3a1. Of the internal enmity there is in their minds and hearts; the carnal mind, as every man's mind is naturally carnal, is not only an enemy, but "enmity" itself, "against God" (Rom. 8:7), to the Being of God--wishing there was no God--to the nature and perfections of God, denying some of them, misrepresenting others, and framing him in their minds, as altogether such an one as themselves--to the purposes and decrees of God, which they cannot bear, and to which they insolently reply; and to the providences of God, they charge with inequality and unrighteousness: and they are inwardly and secretly enemies to Christ, to his person and offices; particularly his kingly office, being unwilling that he should reign over them; and to his gospel, and the special doctrines of it; and to his ordinances, they care not to be subject unto: and so they are to the Spirit, to his Person, whom they know not, nor can receive; to his operations, which they deride and ridicule; the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to them: and they are enemies to the people of God, there is an old and implacable enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; the saints are hated by the world, because chosen and called out of the world; God's elect themselves, while in a state of nature, are hateful, and hating one another; Paul, a chosen vessel of salvation, was, while unregenerate, exceeding mad against the saints.

But, 3a2. There is an external enmity, which appears by wicked works and sinful actions openly committed: which are acts of hostility against God, are contrary to his nature and will are abominable in his sight provoke the eyes of his glory, excite his wrath, and cause it to be revealed from heaven, and for which it comes on the children of disobedience; and all are deserving of it: sins are breaches of the law of

God, render men liable to the curses of it, and to death itself, the sanction of it; they not only all with enmity to God, and show it to him, but set men at a distance from him; so that they have no communion with him, are far off, are without him, and separate from him.

But, 3a3. Men are not only enemies internally, and externally to God, but there is an enmity on the part of God to them; there is a law enmity, or an enmity declared in the law against them; they are declared by the law of God as enemies; traitors, and rebels to him; and as such God's elect were considered, when Christ died to make reconciliation for them; for it is said, "while they were sinners Christ died for them, and when they were enemies they were reconciled to God, the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:8, 10).

Now the far greater part of those for whom Christ died, were not then in an actual sinful state, nor in actual rebellion and enmity against God; for then they were not in actual being; but they were considered as in their apostate head, as sinners in him, and so as rebels and traitors; as such they were deemed by the law, and proceeded against, proclaimed guilty, judgment came upon them to condemnation; they were, in the eye of the law, and in the sight of justice, viewed as enemies, and declared such: and this law enmity is what was slain by Christ, and removed at his death; and not that enmity that was in their minds; that was not removed by and at the death of Christ; that is removed at conversion, when the arrows of the word become sharp in these enemies, which bring them to fall under, and be subject to Christ; when they are made willing in the day of his power, to be saved by him, to submit to his righteousness, and to have him to reign over them: this is the work of the Spirit of Christ: there is a two fold reconciliation, one of which is the work of Christ, and was made at his death: the other the work of his Spirit, at conversion; when, by his grace, men are reconciled to the way of salvation by Christ; and both may be seen in one text (Rom. 5:10).

If there had been no other enmity than what is in the hearts of men against God, there would have been no need of the sufferings and death of Christ to make reconciliation; but there was a law enmity on the part of God, and his justice, which required the death of Christ to take it away. Not that there was any enmity in the heart of God to his elect; that would be inconsistent with his everlasting and unchangeable love, which appeared strongly towards them at the time Christ died for them, reconciled them, and became the propitiation for their sins (Rom. 5:8,10; Titus 3:3, 4; 1 John 4:10).

But they were, according to the law, and in the view of justice, deemed and declared as the enemies of God. So when the subjects of a king rise up in rebellion against him, there may be no enmity in his heart to them; yet they are, according to law, proclaimed rebels, and enemies to him, and may be treated as such, and proceeded against in due form of law; and yet, after all, be pardoned by him. There was, in some sense, a reciprocal enmity between God and men, which made a reconciliation necessary; and which was brought about by the bloodshed, sufferings, and death of Christ, when he slew the enmity of the law, and blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that were against sinners, so making peace (Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 2:14).

Which will further appear, 3b. Secondly, By observing what reconciliation signifies and imports: there is something similar and analogous in a case when it is made between man and man, though not altogether the same; and some caution must be taken, lest we go into mistakes: reconciliation between man and man, supposes a former state of friendship subsisting between them, a breach of that friendship, and a renewing and restoration of it: and there is something like it in reconciliation between God and man; man, in his primeval state, was in strict friendship with God, not only Adam personally being made after the image, and in the likeness of God, having dominion over all the creatures, made for his use, and which were brought to him, to be named by him; and having an habitation in a most delightful garden, where he

was allowed to eat of all kind of fruit in it, but one; and where he enjoyed communion with God: in all this honour he was; and not he only, but all his posterity, considered in him, as their head and representative, were in a state of friendship with God; hence the covenant made with him, in which he was their federal head, is rightly called by divines, "*foedus amicitiae*", a covenant of friendship: but man abode not long in this state; sin, that whisperer and agitator, soon separated chief friends; alienated man from the life of God, caused him to apostatize from him, and to become a traitor to him; filled him with enmity to him, and set him at a distance from him; and in this state of alienation and enmity, all his posterity naturally are; with respect to the elect of God among them, Christ has interposed, appeased justice, satisfied the law, and made reconciliation for them, and brought them into an open state of friendship with God; so that they are considered, in consequence of this, as Abraham was, the friends of God, and are treated as such (Jas. 2:23; Song of Sol. 5:1; John 15:15), have the blessings of divine favour bestowed upon them, and rich communications of grace made unto them.

But here we must proceed warily, and observe some things to prevent mistakes and misrepresentations; for perhaps there is not one thing in the whole scheme of evangelical truths more difficult rightly to fix than this. It should be considered, that properly speaking there are no passions nor perturbations of mind in God, who is a spirit, simple and uncompounded, and not capable of such things; when therefore displeasure, anger, provocation, resentment, &c. are ascribed to him, it must be understood after the manner of men; that he says something in his word, and does something in his providence, and the outward dispensations of it, which is somewhat similar to what men say and do, when the above is the case with them; otherwise we are not to conceive that God is in a passion, and is ruffled, and his mind disturbed, as they are.

Nor are we to imagine there is any change in God, as in men, who are sometimes friends, then enemies, and then friends again; he changes not, there is no variableness nor shadow of turning in him; he may change his voice to his people, and speak comfortably to them in his gospel, who before spoke terribly to them in his law; he may change his outward conduct and behavior towards them, and carry it friendly to them, when before as at a distance: but he never changes his mind, counsel and affections to them; his love is everlasting and invariable; he ever rested in it, and nothing can separate from it; his love is never changed to enmity, and from enmity to love again; his special secret favour, as it is never lost, needed no recovery; nor did Christ, by making satisfaction and reconciliation for sin, procure the love and favour of God to his people; for Christ's being sent to be the propitiation, his sufferings and death, sacrifice and satisfaction, were the fruit and effect of the love of God, and not the cause of it (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:10).

The reconciliation made by Christ was not to the love of God, which was never lost, but to the justice of God, offended by sin; the flaming sword, which turned every way and threatened vengeance, was plunged into the heart of Christ, the surety of his people, which was done to declare the righteousness and satisfy the justice of God; and to open a way for mercy to display itself, and turn its hand upon the little ones; and thus justice and mercy happily met together, and were reconciled to one another in their different pleas and demands (Zech. 13:7; Rom. 3:25, 26; Ps. 85:10).

The reconciliation made by Christ is for sin, to make satisfaction for it (Dan. 9:24; Heb. 2:17), and on that account it is a reconciliation of sinners to God, he being thereby pacified towards them for all that they have done; being well pleased with what Christ has done and suffered for them; he is well pleased with him, and with all that are considered in him, who are accepted in him the beloved, and are admitted into an open state of favour; which is meant by their having access through Christ into the grace wherein they

stand (Matthew 3:17; Eph. 1:6; Rom. 5:2), for though the love of God to his elect is invariable and unchangeable in itself, yet the manifestation of it is different; and it may be distinguished into secret and open love; there are obstructions by sin thrown in the way of love, which must be removed, in order to enjoy open favour and the blessings of it, and which are removed by Christ; thus Christ was made under the law, to redeem his people, that they might receive the adoption of children; and was made a curse for them, that the blessings of grace love had provided in covenant for them, might come upon them; and he was made sin, and a sin offering for them, that they might be made the righteousness of God in him; and be brought into a state of open fellowship and communion with him, who before were kept at a distance.

Thus David, though he most affectionately loved his son Absalom, and longed for him, when for an offence he fled; and though through the mediation of Joab he was allowed to return to Jerusalem, yet the king would not suffer him to see his face for the space of full two years; when by the mediation of the same person he was admitted into the king's presence, taken into open favour, and kissed by him (2 Sam. 13:39; 14:1, 21, 24, 33). 3c. Thirdly, the means by which this reconciliation is made, are the bloodshed and death of Christ; he only is the reconciler and peace maker; a sinner cannot make peace with God or reconciliation, that is, satisfaction for his sins; not by his works of righteousness, which are impure and imperfect; nor by repentance, which the law does not admit of, nor is it any satisfaction to it; nor by faith, for that does not make, only receives the atonement made by Christ; there is nothing a sinner can do, will make peace and reconciliation for him; and what will, he cannot do; which is no less than fulfilling the whole law, and answering all the demands of law and justice (Rom. 8:3, 4), death being the sanction of the law, and the wages of sin, there is no reconciliation to be made but by death; not by the death of slain beasts, which could not take away sin; nor by the death of the sinner himself: the Jews having lost the true notion of the atonement by the Messiah, fancy that a man's death atones for his sins; but it is a false notion, there is no other way of peace, reconciliation, and atonement being made, but by the death of the Son of God; who being God as well as man, could and did give virtue and efficacy to his blood, sufferings, and death in human nature united to his person, as to make them adequate to the said purposes.

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