

I am deeply honored to speak to you from the United States this morning. As a minister of the gospel of Christ, it is always a great joy to open up the Word of God and proclaim the good news of forgiveness of sin by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus.

A few years ago, I befriended a Muslim family from Afghanistan who had been very wealthy in Afghanistan. They were almost royalty over there, but they lost everything because of the Taliban and were forced to flee to the United States for safety. When I met with the father, he was very angry, very depressed, very poor, very humiliated, almost suicidal. He said to me that he thought Allah was angry with him. He said, “He took everything away from me. I do all that he asks me to do, but I am still miserable!”

In the course of the conversation, he asked me, “What do you Christians do when God is mad at you?”

I told him that God never gets mad at us like you described. At times, we dishonor him and grieve him, and we even quench his power in our lives because of sin. Sometimes, he disciplines us as any loving father would discipline his child, but he never treats us as an enemy. Even when things in life are difficult, he never leaves us nor forsakes us, and in the midst of our suffering, he gives us great joy and strengthens us so that we can persevere in our faith with the certain hope of heaven. Yes, because we are sinners, I told him, we were His enemy once, but because Christ paid the penalty for our sin on the cross, we have been reconciled to Him. Indeed, Jesus took our sin and gave us His righteousness. He satisfied the wrath of His Father for us by dying in our place so now God sees us as His children, not as His enemy.

Well, he was very puzzled with all of this, and asked me to explain more about God’s wrath and how Jesus supposedly satisfied that wrath so that we could be reconciled to Him. I took him to **1 John 4:10**, and there we read, “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.”

Unfortunately, this man, like most people, did not realize how devastating sin really is because he didn’t understand how holy God is. You see, if you have a low view of God’s holiness, you will have a high view of yourself and a diminished view of sin. As a result, you will have a distorted understanding of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, our only hope of forgiveness.

In **1 John 4:10**, we are told that God loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sin. The word propitiate in the original language is *hilasmos*, and it’s a term that’s seldom even used in the Bible. It’s probably a term you’ve never even heard before. It means to appease, or placate, or satisfy. This text and others tell us that because of the God’s love, the Father sent His son, Jesus, to be the propitiation or the appeasement, the satisfaction, the placation, for our sins. Now, what does this mean? Well, to answer this question, we must understand three things. This is what I explained to my Muslim friend.

Selected Passages

First, you must understand the *holiness of God*. Both in the Hebrew and the Greek, we understand that the word Holy means to be separate, to be completely other, to be of a completely different nature, not to be compared with anything else created. This means that God is utterly transcendent, that he is utterly separated from sin. In **Exodus 15:11**, in the Song of Moses, we read, “Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?” In **1 Samuel 2:2**, we read “No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You.” In **Isaiah 6:3**, we read the story of the Seraphim that hovered around the throne of God, and they called out to one another saying, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” Also, in **Isaiah 57:15**, God says that His very “name is Holy”.

We must understand that the world has only seen one holy being, and that is Jesus Christ. Holiness is the all encompassing attribute of God. It portrays His consummate perfection and eternal glory. It stands alone as the defining characteristic of His person. It is the summation of all His attributes. Because God is holy, His law demands perfect holiness. God hates sin, and we all sin. The Bible says in **Ecclesiastes 7:20**, “For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin”. Paul tells us in **Romans 3:23**, “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Moreover, God has made it clear in His word that because of sin no man can survive Gods judgment without a remedy for his sins. In **Revelation 6:17**, that text speaks of the great day of His wrath that will come, where no sinful man is able to stand.

We must understand that sinners cannot satisfy God’s holy justice. Sin is what makes peace with God impossible. Because of sin, there is an infinite chasm between sinful man and a Holy God. God has made it clear that sinners can do nothing to earn their salvation. The Bible tells us that we are utterly unable to save ourselves. We’re dead in our trespasses and sins. We’re like spiritual cadavers. The word of God tells us that we’re blind, we’re ignorant, we’re deaf, and by nature, we are haters of the one true God.

So, sinful man is in a terrible situation, and he is absolutely helpless to do anything about it. And if that isn’t bad enough, because God is Holy, all sin must be punished. In fact, if God wasn’t angry with sin, He wouldn’t be perfectly holy because holiness cannot exist apart from justice. Now, unfortunately Satan, the Father of Lies, offers man many counterfeit religious systems that man can choose from. He convinces sinners that they can somehow earn their salvation through various religious works. In order to do this, he must deceive a man into thinking that his sin isn’t really that bad, and God isn’t really that holy. The apostle Paul describes this in **2 Corinthians 4:4**, where he says for these people “the gospel is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world”, referring to Satan, “has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.”

So, in order to understand Christ as our propitiation, we must not only understand the holiness of God, but secondly, the *wrath, or the judgment, of God*. All through the Old Testament, we read repeatedly how sin “kindled the wrath of the Lord.” In **Psalms 98:9**, the psalmist says, “For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He

Selected Passages

shall judge the world, and the peoples with equity.” We’re told in **Romans 1:18**, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” In **Romans 3:23**, we’re told that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Peter even tells us in **1 Peter 4:5**, that sinners will one day “give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” You see we must understand that because of God’s Holy justice, His anger is kindled against sinners. His holy law has been violated, and sin cannot go unpunished. His wrath must be appeased. It must be satisfied. It must be placated. Only the sacrifice of Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, can accomplish this. This is why He is the propitiation of our sins.

So, as we understand God’s holiness and His wrath, now we can understand, thirdly, the *propitiation of God*. Again, the word, propitiate, means to appease, or placate, or satisfy. The term is literally used to describe a sacrifice for atonement. You may recall that in the Old Testament, in both the Tabernacle and the Temple, there was the Holy of Holies. No one could dare come into that inner sanctuary that housed the Ark of the Covenant except the High Priest, one time per year, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Inside that Ark, was the Covenant, the Law of Moses, the Holy standard. Above the Ark, on each end, were golden Cherubs with outstretched wings that symbolically served to guard the holiness of God. Between the Cherubs, hovered the ineffable light of God’s Presence, called the Shekinah Glory; a light that was too brilliant to even be seen by fallen eyes of man without dying.

But there was a lid on top of that Ark, a golden lid that separated the Law within from the Holy presence above. The reason for this is to symbolize that because the Law of God had been violated, God’s holiness cannot be contaminated with sin. That no one because of sin could possibly enter into the presence of God’s glory. But, dear friends, that golden lid of separation has staggering implications for every sinner who wants to be reconciled to a Holy God; to have peace with God. For on that lid, divine justice and grace came together symbolically when the High Priest sprinkled the blood of an animal once per year to make atonement for the sins of Israel. That lid was called the Mercy Seat.

In fact, the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, translates the word Mercy Seat, *Hilasterion*, which means propitiation; the place where the just wrath of God was symbolically propitiated, where His fury was temporarily appeased, where His anger was symbolically satisfied, and where His vengeance upon sinners was placated. What an amazing picture of ultimate and final propitiation; the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ who alone could satisfy the Father’s wrath. In fact, the whole Levitical system was an object lesson explaining the need for sinful man to be reconciled to a Holy God. This was a transaction that required propitiation of divine wrath against sin. So, the animal’s blood never paid for one single sin. In fact, in **Hebrews 10:4**, we read that “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins”, but we learn in **Hebrews 9:12**, that Jesus “entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption”.

Selected Passages

What is even more amazing is that God Himself provided the means to appease His own wrath. We saw this pictured in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve's sin. You will recall that the fig leaves of their own efforts would not do. God had to kill an innocent animal to provide a covering, because apart from the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. What an amazing paradox to think that God, Himself, provided the very means to appease His own wrath. He did this through His Son, the God/Man, Christ Jesus; the One who was fully man to die for men and yet fully God to be the perfect and Spotless Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what we see in **I John 4:10**, "In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Dear friends, you must either trust in Christ who alone can satisfy the wrath of God, or you must trust in yourself to be the propitiation. This is something you will never be able to do, even if you spend an eternity in hell. You see, these are the only two options; the only two remedies! God cannot exchange His wrath for love unless justice has been satisfied. Oh what an amazing love, that Jesus would voluntarily pay the penalty for sin.

My friend, I hope God will give you eyes to see what I fear my Muslim friend is still unable to see. I hope that you will have eyes by God's grace to see how the Holiness, the wrath, and the love of God are woven together into the scarlet rope of saving grace. I hope you understand that only through Jesus can justice and mercy coexist. Were it not for Him, we would have no hope of salvation, for our sin is too great and God's Holiness too infinite for us to ever be able to satisfy God's Holy justice. For this reason, Jesus said in **John 3:36**, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Dear friends, I invite you to examine your heart today. I pray that you will ask yourself, "Do I trust in God's provision for salvation, the Lord Jesus, or will I try to satisfy the wrath of a Holy God through my own works?" Won't you ask Christ to be merciful to you and save you from the wrath that you deserve? For He alone is your only hope of salvation. We are told in the Word of God (**Romans 10:9**), that "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved."

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