

What is propitiation?

Question: "What is propitiation?"

Answer: The word propitiation carries the basic idea of appeasement, or satisfaction, specifically towards God. Propitiation is a two-part act that involves appeasing the wrath of an offended person and being reconciled to him.

The necessity of appeasing God is something many religions have in common. In ancient pagan religions, as well as in many religions today, the idea is taught that man appeases God by offering various gifts or sacrifices. However, the Bible teaches that God Himself has provided the only means through which His wrath can be appeased and sinful man can be reconciled to Him. In the New Testament, the act of propitiation always refers to the work of God and not the sacrifices or gifts offered by man. The reason for this is that man is totally incapable of satisfying God's justice except by spending eternity in hell. There is no service, sacrifice or gift that man can offer that will appease the holy wrath of God or satisfy His perfect justice. The only satisfaction, or propitiation, that could be acceptable to God and that could reconcile man to Him, had to be made by God. For this reason God the Son, Jesus Christ, came into the world in human flesh to be the perfect sacrifice for sin and make atonement or "propitiation for the sins of the people" ([Hebrews 2:17](#)).

The word propitiation is used in several key verses to explain what Jesus accomplished through His death on the cross. For example, in [Romans 3:24-25](#) we see that believers in Christ have been "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed." These verses are a key point in Paul's argument in the Book of Romans and are really at the heart of the Gospel message.

In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul has made the argument that everybody, both Jew and Gentile alike, is under the condemnation of God and deserving of His wrath ([Romans 1:18](#)). Everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God ([Romans 3:23](#)). All of us deserve His wrath and punishment. God in His infinite grace and mercy has provided a way that His wrath can be appeased and we can be reconciled to Him. That way is through the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ, as the atonement or payment for sins. It is through faith in Jesus Christ as God's perfect sacrifice, foretold in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament, that we can be reconciled to God. It is only because of Christ's perfect life, His death on the cross, and His resurrection on the third day that a lost sinner deserving of hell can be reconciled to a Holy God. The wonderful truth of the Gospel message is that Christians are saved from God's wrath and reconciled to God not because "we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" ([1 John 4:10](#)).

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" ([John 14:6](#)). The only way for God's wrath against sinful man to be appeased and for us to be reconciled to God is through Jesus Christ. There is no other way. This truth is also communicated in [1 John 2:2](#); "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." An important part of Christ's saving work includes deliverance from God's wrath that the unbelieving sinner is under, because Jesus' atonement on the cross is the only thing that can turn away God's divine wrath. Those that reject Christ as their Savior and refuse to believe in Him have no hope of salvation. They can only look forward to facing the wrath of God that they have stored up for the coming day of judgment ([Romans 2:5](#)). There is no other propitiation or sacrifice that can be made for their sins.