

“The Grounds of Our Justification: Christ and His Cross (Solus Christus) (Part 1)” –

Romans 3:24-26

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October 11, 2020

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in Romans 3...

If you are a guest with us, we have been walking through the New Testament letter called James and decided to pause for a little mini-series on the doctrine of justification. The reason for this is that the next section in James involves some of the most contested verses in the letter, largely because of the alleged tension that exists between what James says on justification and what the Apostle Paul says. We began with Paul last week and will continue with Paul today.

The paragraph that will occupy our attention is the same one as last week. It's the paragraph that Martin Luther described, in the margin of the Luther Bible, as “the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle [to the Romans], and the whole Bible.”¹ This could be debated, of course, but the significance of this section is hard to overstate. Let's take a look at it. I'll begin reading in verse 21, of chapter 3. Follow along as I read. The most important thing I will say to you today is what I am about to read now. This is God's Word...

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:21-26)

Last week we largely focused on verses 21 to 24 as we considered the source of our justification before God. What is justification? Last week I offered the following definition, which comes from an essay by Philip Eveson.

“The doctrine of justification concerns God's gracious judicial verdict in advance of the day of judgment, pronouncing guilty sinners—who turn in self-despairing trust to Jesus Christ—forgiven, acquitted of all charges and declared morally upright in God's sight.”²

Justification concerns how guilty sinners are counted as righteous in God's sight. It's about how “the righteous God righteously righteouses the unrighteous.”³ And what we considered last week is that the source of this justification is God and His grace. Paul says, “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified [i.e., counted as righteous] by his grace as a gift*” (3:23-24). God takes the initiative. God is the giver. Those whom He justifies receive their standing apart from personal merit and achievement. Justification comes from God and is by grace alone (*sola gratia*). It is a gift. It's free and undeserved. It's grace.

Now then, having considered the source of our justification, let's turn our attention to...

The Grounds of Our Justification: Christ and His Cross

When Paul brings grace into the conversation, he recognizes that he has introduced a problem in the minds of many readers. John Stott captures it well,

“If God justifies sinners freely by his grace, on what ground does he do so? How is it possible for the righteous God to declare the unrighteous to be righteous without either compromising his righteousness or condoning their unrighteousness?”⁴

Even a casual reading of the Bible will show that God is righteous. He cares about justice. His law calls Israel’s judges to acquit the innocent and condemn the guilty (Deut. 25:1). He pronounces woe on those who do not (Isa. 5:21). The book of Proverbs tells us that “*he who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord*” (Prov. 17:15). Yet here in Romans, Paul describes God as the One “*who justifies the ungodly*” (Rom. 4:5). How can this be? The answer is Christ and His cross. “Without the cross the justification of the unjust would be unjustified, immoral, and therefore impossible.” The only way that God “*justifies the ungodly*” (4:5) is that “*Christ died for the ungodly*” (5:6).⁵

In verses 24 and 25, Paul shows us that the cross of Christ makes possible our justification in God’s sight because it redeems His people and removes His wrath. Both of those things are necessary for us to be justified. We will not possess a right standing before God, if we remain slaves to sin, hence the need of redemption. And we will not be counted right in God’s sight, if God’s anger is against us, hence the need of propitiation. Then Paul explains, in the rest of the paragraph, that the cross simultaneously demonstrates God’s righteousness or justice, showing that our justification in no way compromises His character or deviates from the moral standards He set for His people. That’s how the text unfolds. Now let’s look at the particulars, starting with...

The Redemption of the Cross

What does “*redemption*” mean? Quite simply it means “deliverance at a cost” or “release by payment”.⁶ That payment is sometimes called a “ransom.” In fact, the Greek word used here for “*redemption*” (*apolutrosis*) has embedded within it the word for “ransom” (*lutron*). Romans 3:24 makes sense, when it says that our “*redemption*” is “*in Christ Jesus,*” since, as the Bible says elsewhere, Jesus “*came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45). “The redemption is in Christ Jesus because Jesus is the ransom.”⁷ His life paid the price for our deliverance.

This “*redemption*” language is frequently used in the contexts involving slavery. Not the variety from American history, but the kind that was common in the Jewish world of the Old Testament and the Roman world of Paul’s day. In those days, slavery was usually reserved for prisoners of war and those who had significant debts. If you fell on troubled times, you could sell yourself into slavery to work off your debt. God’s law actually prescribed a means that someone called a *go-el*—a [kinsman] redeemer—can actually pay whatever debt you owed on your behalf, thereby securing your release from slavery and restoring your freedom (Lev. 25:25).

This imagery is prominent in the Exodus story, which establishes something of a pattern for how God intends to save His people. The people were slaves to Pharaoh. But God rescued them. He redeemed them. He paid every price necessary to secure their release from that slavery in Egypt. He even provided a means of deliverance from death through the blood of a lamb. That’s what redemption looks like.

This becomes a metaphor of what Christ does in our salvation. We all have sinned (Rom. 3:23) and racked up a spiritual debt (6:23), resulting in our slavery to sin and death (6:20). We were helpless to deal with this debt. But Jesus comes to be our *go-el*—our redeemer—paying the price for our release. And since, as Paul will say eventually in Romans, “*the wages of sin is death*” (6:23), the price that He pays is His very life. He pays our debt with His life so that we won’t have to pay with ours. He substitutes Himself. That is how our redemption is secured. And that is why Paul says elsewhere,

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

Clearly he sees the work of Christ as redemptive.

Additionally, we should add that the Greco-Roman background of redemption commerce in the first-century also plays into Paul’s metaphor of redemption. D. A. Carson describes the practice:

“The way it normally worked was like this: the redeemer paid the price money for the slave to a pagan temple plus a small cut for the temple priests (and how small a cut was variable!). Then the temple paid the money to the owner of the slave, and the slave was then transferred to the ownership of this temple’s god. Thus, the slave was redeemed from the slavery to the slave owner, in order to become a slave to the god. Of course, if you are a slave to a pagan god, that basically means that you are free and can do anything you want. It was in part a legal fiction in order to say that the person does not lose his slave status but nevertheless is freed from slavery in the human sphere because the price has been paid. The man has now been redeemed.”⁸

It’s almost certain that Paul has that background in mind here in Romans. As Carson explains,

“Paul picks up that language and says that Christians have been redeemed from slavery to sin, but as a result of this, they have become slaves to Jesus Christ (see Romans 6).”⁹

But if the cross is the ransom price Christ paid to set us free from sin and death, then, we might wonder, to whom was that ransom paid? To answer that, we should ask another question—to whom was the debt of our sin owed? The answer is God Himself. When we study the Bible it’s hard to miss that “our sin offended God’s justice and kindled His wrath.”¹⁰ Sin against a holy God is high treason. The just consequence is death because there is no one more holy or innocent that we could sin against and all of our sin is, first and foremost, against Him. So how amazing is it that God, “*being rich in mercy*” and “*because of the great love with which he loved us*” (Eph. 2:4), sent His one and only Son as payment for our redemption? One author writes,

“This would have been a noble work even if we had been loyal subjects of God’s kingdom who had fallen captive through no fault of our own, but this was not the case. He redeemed us even though we were not victims but criminals. We carried the blame. We rushed headlong into rebellion against our God. Our condemnation and imprisonment under His justice and wrath was our own doing. Our sin formed the shackles and provoked the executioner’s ax.”¹¹

But, brothers and sisters, that ax fell on Christ Jesus. He took our place. “So the cross is the place where the Judge takes the judgment.”¹² And this is the glory of the cross of Christ. The only innocent One, took the place of the guilty. And every guilty sinner whose faith rest in Christ alone is counted as righteous as Christ. This is the gospel. This is the good news. “The justification of the believer is a gift that comes through the redemption made possible through the person and work of Jesus Christ.”¹³ This is given freely to us through faith. Nevertheless the price paid—the life of the Son of God—is a price we could never fully comprehend. Peter said,

“...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” (1 Peter 1:18-19)

This is the basis for our justification. We “*are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 3:24). But as glorious as that is, there is more to say. And Paul says more. Look again at Romans 3. Right after describing our justification as being “*through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*” he

says, in verse 25, that this Jesus is the One “*whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*” And this leads us to...

The Propitiation of the Cross

Verse 25 is so important, even if its truth is all but neglected in many famous churches or our day.¹⁴ Paul tells us here that God’s purpose in Christ’s cross was “*a propitiation by his blood*”. That being the case, we should take the time to understand what this word, “*propitiation,*” means. Simply put, “To propitiate is to satisfy [or remove] someone’s anger or wrath or hostility and make peace.”¹⁵ Many people reject the notion that God is a God of wrath, but to do so is to discard clear biblical teaching. “There is nothing unprincipled, unpredictable or uncontrolled about God’s anger; it is aroused by evil alone.”¹⁶

The first two and a half chapters of Romans, as we’ve seen, are aimed at convincing us that we are all sinners and, therefore, accountable to God. Being accountable to God is to be under His “*wrath and fury*” (2:8). In no uncertain terms, Paul says that “*the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth*” (1:18). And in case we are really dense and still think that Paul is not referring to us, he reminds us that “*None is righteous, no, not one*” (Romans 3:10) and “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (3:23).

If that’s true—if it’s true that the wrath of God and the fury of God’s anger stands against sinners—then verse 25 is incredible news! Worship-inducing news! I love the way John Piper describes this news in one of his sermons...

“God, whose wrath is on us, undertakes to put Christ forward as a wrath remover, a wrath absorber, an anger placater. How? By Christ’s blood. God sends his Son to bear his wrath. God sends his Son to bear his fury. God sends his son to bear his own judgment. The cross is God’s propitiating God. The love of God bore the wrath of God in the death of the Son of God. That’s the gospel at its most essential core. Our biggest problem in the world is the wrath of God. If an omnipotent God exists, if he’s angry with humanity because of our rebellion, that causes every problem to pale in comparison. This verse is the answer. This verse is the solution. God put Christ forward to shield us from that. That’s what propitiation is.”¹⁷

Wow! This should be a popular idea with every Christian today, but it’s definitely not a popular idea in our day and age. People today don’t like to think of God as angry. An angry or wrathful God is distasteful to them. “Why would God condemn anyone?” Well, that’s what the first three chapters of the Bible explain and the first three chapters of Romans reinforce. But some wrongly assume that you can’t have a God of love, if He is also a God of wrath. But I say you can’t be a loving God, without wrath. Why? Because if you are truly loving, you must hate the things that destroy or harm what you love. Divine anger exists because of love. It’s a righteous anger. And ignoring it and imagining God differently, doesn’t change who He is.

But we are not the first generation to want to do away with any suggestion that God could be angry and condemn sinners. This is nothing new. Famously, there was a scholar by the name of C. H. Dodd, who struggled with the idea of God’s wrath, and wanted to render the word here, in Romans 3:25, “*expiation.*” Expiation refers to the wiping away or forgiving of sin, without any necessary connotations of God’s wrath. Now, does Christ’s work on the cross serve as our expiation? Absolutely. The question is: does expiation capture the idea Paul intended in verse 25? The general consensus is no.

The only other place in the New Testament this particular word is used is in Hebrews 9:5, where the word is sometimes translated “*atonement cover*” or “*mercy seat,*” a reference to that cover on top of the Ark of the Covenant that was housed in the Holy of Holies, at the back of the temple or tabernacle. Some English translations read “*mercy seat*” as a result.¹⁸ Most of the occurrences of the word in the Greek version of the Old

Testament (LXX) have this covering in mind (21 of 27 occurrences). On the Day of Atonement, sacrificial blood was sprinkled on top of this covering by the High Priest who carried out the annual atonement ritual for the nation of Israel. This blood was intended to avert God's wrath by atoning for the people's sin. This so-called mercy seat "came to represent for the Jews the place where, or the means by which, God took care of his people's sin problem." Not surprisingly, some translations render the word "sacrifice of atonement."¹⁹ Doug Moo writes,

"It makes perfect sense for Paul to allude to this central item in Israel's atonement ritual. Christ, in his sacrifice on the cross, is now the place where God takes care of his people's sins. The meaning, then, is broad, encompassing the acts of both expiation and propitiation. The NIV's 'sacrifice of atonement' (cf. also NRSV) is probably a good translation."²⁰

I would hope so, since Moo chaired the committee that produced the NIV translation. Still, I think I prefer the ESV, NASB, HCSB, KJV, and other English translations that read "*propitiation*" because "propitiation includes expiation, but is much more than expiation—it is the turning away of God's wrath."²¹ The context fits this idea because that is what Paul has been showing is our great problem—the wrath of God—that needs to be dealt with (1:18; 2:5; 3:5).²² The point of verse 25 is to show that God "*put forward*" Jesus to address this problem, to avert this wrath.²³ In short, "According to the Christian revelation, God's own great love propitiated his own holy wrath through the gift of his own dear Son, who took our place, bore our sin and died our death." And, in this way, "God himself gave himself to save us from himself."²⁴ And what better news could there be than that?

"When we acknowledge Christ's role as a propitiation, it means that once Christ forgives us of our sin, it can rise against us no more. Christ's sacrifice nullifies the law's condemnation against us. This means that Christ's sacrifice conveys peace for all who seek shelter in Him."²⁵

As the Apostle Paul will say later in Romans,

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:1-4).

No condemnation. None. Not because God ignored the sin of those who are in Christ Jesus through faith, but because He condemned their sin in the crucified Christ. He died our death. We have been "*crucified with Christ*" (Gal. 2:20). Similarly, Romans 6 tells us,

"We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin." (Romans 6:6-7)

That's redemption. And there is no redemption without propitiation. And there is no justification without both. And that is the point of our passage today.

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." (Romans 3:23-25a)

All of that good news is received "*by faith*", that is, trusting in Jesus Christ, who was crucified for our sins and raised for our justification. It all comes back to Jesus and His work. He is the object of our faith. He is the heart of the Gospel. He is the grounds of our justification. Christ alone. Or as the reformers put it: "*solus Christus.*"

Solus Christus

There is more to say about these verses in Romans 3. I introduced them by claiming that I wanted us to see what they taught us about redemption, propitiation, and demonstration. We have only addressed the first two of these. The third I hope to consider with you next week, Lord willing. But let's close our time by just wrapping ourselves up in this warm blanket for our souls—*Solus Christus*, Christ alone.

Last week's sermon taught us about and allowed us to celebrate another of these famous "*solas*" of the Reformation, *sola gratia*, grace alone. Today's verses remind us that our salvation is caught up and accomplished in and through Christ alone. What wonderful good news. Let me give you one example why, as we close. The Christian has the wonderful privilege to say, "Jesus paid it all!" That is our great comfort. That is our great hope. We don't live like people who subscribe to other religions, never knowing if we quite measure up. We accept by faith that Jesus measured up and that matters. "Jesus paid it all!" What a great source of assurance!

Of course, assurance is one of those things that can escape even genuinely converted, truly born again, believers. And pastors can attest that assurance is something that even true Christians can struggle with. Many famous Christians in history fought repeated struggles for assurance, sometimes even lifelong battles. William Cooper, one of my favorite hymn writers, comes to mind. But what is the prescription for the Christian struggling with assurance? The answer—Christ alone!²⁶

But Satan is crafty, isn't he? He loves to slither in and whisper in our ear, "You are a sinner. God will never accept you. We all know how hideous your sin is and just how guilty you are before God."²⁷ You know those thoughts, don't you? Some of you know those dark nights of the soul. Listen. You're not alone.

Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation himself, described his own struggle in this area. But what was the medicine to help him stand firm? Christ alone. Commenting on Galatians 1:4, where we read that "*the Lord Jesus Christ...gave himself for our sins*", Luther wrote the following:

"When the devil accuses us and says, 'You are a sinner and therefore damned,' we should answer, 'Because you say I am a sinner, I will be righteous and saved.' 'No,' says the devil, 'you will be damned.' And I reply, 'No, for I fly to Christ, who gave himself for my sins. Satan, you will not prevail against me when you try to terrify me by setting forth the greatness of my sins and try to bring me into heaviness, distrust, despair, hatred, contempt and blasphemy against God. On the contrary, when you say I am a sinner, you give me armor and weapons against yourself, so that with your own sword I may cut your throat and tread you under my feet, for Christ died for sinners...As often as you object that I am a sinner, so often you remind me of the benefit of Christ my Redeemer, on whose shoulders, and not on mine, lie all my sins. So when you say I am a sinner, you do not terrify me but comfort me immeasurably."²⁸

That, brothers and sisters, is the power of Christ alone! You're not in the business of justification. You're not scrambling to attain redemption. You're not trying to make propitiation. These fall on Christ's shoulders. He is your hope in life and in death. You're a great sinner. True indeed. But He's a greater Savior. And you are resting by faith in Christ alone. That's the grounds of your justification. That's the reason for your redemption. That's your confidence in propitiation. Christ alone. "Satan's accusations may be true, but when clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ, they no longer have any power."²⁹

John Calvin serves up the same medicine for sin-sick souls, when he wrote,

“If we seek redemption, it lies in [Christ’s] passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if remission of the curse, in his cross [Gal. 3:13]; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification, in his blood.”³⁰

What is that? That’s the glory Christ alone! Salvation that is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, said Luther, “means peace of conscience.”³¹ Amen! Hallelujah! What a Savior!

So I commend Jesus Christ to you today as your only hope in life and in death. Turn from your sin and self-sufficiency and trust in Christ to save. His precious blood was shed to fully pay for your sin. Receive Him as Lord and Savior today. Pray to Him. Confess your sin. Ask Him to save you on the basis of His work—His life, His death, His resurrection—not your works. And He will save you today. That’s the beauty of the Gospel. And you could leave this place today made right with God, if you would put your trust in Christ alone to save.

And for those of you who have, rejoice in what Christ has accomplished for you. What a Savior you have!

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:19-22a)

Let’s pray...

¹ Quoted in Andrew David Naselli, “The Righteous God Righteously Righteouses the Unrighteous: Justification according to Romans,” in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 220-221.

² Philip Eveson unpacks this definition in greater detail at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-doctrine-of-justification/>. I have modified his punctuation slightly, without violating his intent, to make the progression more intelligible in American English.

³ See Andrew David Naselli, “The Righteous God Righteously Righteouses the Unrighteous: Justification according to Romans,” in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 213-238.

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans* (BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 112. That’s really what this passage is about. Michael P. V. Barrett rightly states, “Paul’s logic [in Romans 3:23-26] sums up our need for justification by resolving the tension between God’s inflexible righteousness and our inability to conform to His absolute standard.” Michael P. V. Barrett, *Complete in Him: A Guide to Understanding and Enjoying the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 127.

⁵ Stott, 112-113.

⁶ See Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 40-45.

⁷ John Piper, “God’s Free Gift of Righteousness,” accessed online as of the day of preaching at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/gods-free-gift-of-righteousness>.

⁸ D. A. Carson, *Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 59.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Paul Washer, *The Gospel’s Power and Message* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 155.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Timothy Keller, *Romans 1-7 For You* (The Good Book Company, 2014), 83.

¹³ Washer, 156.

¹⁴ John Piper went as far as saying: “That’s probably the most important verse in the Bible, but I wouldn’t die for that. Though if I had to choose, I’d take the bullet for yes rather than no.” John Piper, “A Radical Revelation of the Cross: The Sovereignty of God and the Sacrifice of Jesus,” accessed online at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/a-radical-revelation-of-the-cross>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Stott, 115.

¹⁷ Piper, “A Radical Revelation of the Cross”.

¹⁸ Stott argues against this translation: “But the contrary arguments seem conclusive. First, if Paul meant ‘mercy-seat’ by *hilastērion*, he would inevitably have added the definite article. Secondly, the concept is incongruous in Romans which, unlike Hebrews, does not move ‘in the sphere of Levitical symbolism’. Thirdly, the metaphor would be confusing and even contradictory, since it would represent Jesus as being simultaneously the victim whose blood was shed and sprinkled and the place where the sprinkling took place. Fourthly, Paul’s sense of personal indebtedness to Christ crucified was so profound that he would hardly have likened him to ‘an inanimate piece of temple furniture’.” Stott, 113-114.

¹⁹ Douglas Moo, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 129.

²⁰ Ibid. He also points out, however, that “In secular Greek, this word and its cognates often refer to various means by which the wrath of the gods could be ‘propitiated.’ A sacrifice was offered or a monument dedicated, acts that served to ‘turn away’ the wrath of a god. Many interpreters think Paul uses the word in this sense. Many English versions accordingly translate this word as ‘propitiation’ (e.g., KJV; NASB).” Ibid., 128. Still we should be careful to draw an exact equivalence between these pagan notions and what God does in Christ. There are at least three fundamental distinctions, which John Stott summarizes thusly: “We should not be shy of using the word ‘propitiation’ in relation to the cross, any more than we should drop the word ‘wrath’ in relation to God. Instead, we should struggle to reclaim and reinstate this language by showing that the Christian doctrine of propitiation is totally different from pagan or animistic superstitions. The need, the author and the nature of the Christian propitiation are all different. First, the need. Why is a propitiation necessary? The pagan answer is because the gods are bad-tempered, subject to moods and fits, and capricious. The Christian answer is because God’s holy wrath rests on evil. There is nothing unprincipled, unpredictable or uncontrolled about God’s anger; it is aroused by evil alone. Secondly, the author. Who undertakes to do the propitiating? The pagan answer is that we do. We have offended the gods; so we must appease them. The Christian answer, by contrast, is that we cannot placate the righteous anger of God. We have no means whatever by which to do so. But God in his undeserved love has done for us what we could never do by ourselves. *God presented him* (sc. Christ) as a sacrifice of atonement. John wrote similarly: ‘God ... loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice (*hilasmos*) for our sins.’ The love, the idea, the purpose, the initiative, the action and the gift were all God’s. Thirdly, the nature. How has the propitiation been accomplished? What is the propitiatory sacrifice? The pagan answer is that we have to bribe the gods with sweets, vegetable offerings, animals, and even human sacrifices. The Old Testament sacrificial system was entirely different, since it was recognized that God himself has ‘given’ the sacrifices to his people to make atonement. And this is clear beyond doubt in the Christian propitiation, for God gave his own Son to die in our place, and in giving his Son he gave himself (5:8, 8:32). In sum, it would be hard to exaggerate the differences between the pagan and the Christian views of propitiation. In the pagan perspective, human beings try to placate their bad-tempered deities with their own paltry offerings. According to the Christian revelation, God’s own great love propitiated his own holy wrath through the gift of his own dear Son, who took our place, bore our sin and died our death. Thus God himself gave himself to save us from himself.” Stott, 115. Cf. Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 85-87.

²¹ Keller, 83. Robert A. Peterson writes, “Propitiation is directed toward God and expiation is directed toward sin. Propitiation is the turning away of God’s wrath, and expiation is the putting away of sin.” Peterson, 85.

²² “The main reason these options are not satisfactory, and a reference to propitiation seems necessary, is the context. In these verses Paul is describing God’s solution to the human predicament, which is not only sin but God’s wrath upon sin (1:18; 2:5; 3:5). And where there is divine wrath, there is the need to avert it. We should not be shy of using the word ‘propitiation’ in relation to the cross, any more than we should drop the word ‘wrath’ in relation to God. Instead, we should struggle to reclaim and reinstate this language by showing that the Christian doctrine of propitiation is totally different from pagan or animistic superstitions. The need, the author and the nature of the Christian propitiation are all different.” Stott, 114-115.

²³ J. I. Packer writes, “The cross has this propitiatory effect because in his suffering Christ assumed our identity, as it were, and endured the retributive judgment due to us (‘the curse of the law,’ Gal. 3:13) as our substitute, in our place, with the damning record of our transgressions mailed by God to his cross as the tally of crimes for which he was now dying (Col. 2:14; cf. Isa. 53:4-6; Matt. 27:37; Luke 22:37).” J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993, 2020), 151-152.

²⁴ Stott, 115.

²⁵ J. V. Fesko, *Romans* (LCECNT; Grand Rapids: 2018), 84.

²⁶ Matthew Barrett, “Christ Alone,” in *Sola: How the Five Solas Are Still Reforming the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 95-96.

²⁷ Ibid., 96.

²⁸ See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/ray-ortlund/how-to-fight-the-accuser/>.

²⁹ Barrett, “Christ Alone,” 96.

³⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 2.16.19. Cited in Ibid., 96-97.

³¹ Ibid., 97.