

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 3:25-26

Student Notes

Three technical terms which Paul uses to explain what God has done in and through Christ's cross: "Apolytrois", "Hilasterion", and "Endeixis".

- "Apolytrois" -- He has redeemed his people.
- "Hilasterion" -- He has propitiated his wrath.
- "Endeixis" -- He has demonstrated his justice.

- **Apolytrois: He Has Redeemed His People:** (Review)

Verse 24 says "... And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

The word for redemption – apolytrois – refers to the act of buying a slave out of bondage in order to set him free. Paul could have used this language as a reference to Israel's redemption from either the Egyptian bondage or their later deliverance from the Babylonian captivity.

"Apolytrois" -- an ancient Greek commercial word. It was borrowed from the marketplace – in the same way "justification" is a legal term borrowed from the courts of law.

Old Testament apolytrois: Purchasing a slave in order to release him. They were said to be redeemed. Common usage: Israel "redeemed" from Egyptian and Babylonian captivity.

The New Testament spiritual picture: Humans are in bondage to our sin and guilt. We are utterly unable to redeem ourselves so Christ redeemed us. (In order to free us).

Jesus's mission: "To give his life as a ransom for many". – Matthew 20:28

- **Hilasterion: He has propitiated his wrath.**

NIV translation of verse 25: "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood."

The KJV version: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in God."

The Greek word, "hilasterion", originally meant to placate someone's anger.

Some translators and theologians feel to propionate God is an unworthy picture of Him. They claim "propitiation" is more of a heathen concept than a Christian one.

- **Two Primary Substitute Ways Of Understanding "Hilasterion":**

- **The Mercy Seat**

Translation of "Hilasterion" as "Mercy-Seat" – the golden lid on the Ark of the Covenant that stood in the inner sanctuary.

The analogy: Since the sacrificial blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat on the Day of Atonement – Paul is indicating that Jesus is himself now the mercy-seat where God and sinners are reconciled.

Issues with this view:

1. Paul does not use the definite article – "The Mercy Seat in the use of "hilasterion".
2. The concept of Christ as the "Mercy Seat" is problematic because, unlike Hebrews, Romans does not use Levitical symbolism to explain New Testament realities.
3. For "hilasterion" to be the "Mercy Seat" -- Christ would have to function as both the sacrifice and the place where the blood was sprinkled. (Confusion)

- **A Sin Expiation**

Some theologians suggest that the blood being paid is not to placate God – but Sin -- as a force in our world. The goal is to annul sin, or remove spiritual defilement.

- **The Question: "Is propitiation really a pagan concept?"** -- The evidence for God's Wrath in Romans:
- Romans 1:18: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness..."

- Romans 2:5; “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.”
- Romans 3:5: “But if our unrighteousness brings out God’s righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)”

Paul represents that God’s wrath is indeed a present reality – and that wrath must be dealt with. Where there is sin, there is God’s wrath upon sin. If there is indeed divine wrath, isn’t there is the need to avert it?

- **Two questions that clarify “propitiation” in Romans:**

1. Who Is Doing The Propitiating?

In pagan religion it is the role of the priests or people to placate an angry god. The ancient view was, “We have offended the gods; so we must appease them.”

That’s not the process in Christianity -- we know that we cannot placate the wrath of God. We lack the means of satisfying God’s righteous demands.

NIV: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement.” KJV: “God hath set [Him] forth to be a propitiation through faith in God.”

God’s love offered Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement – as our “hilasterion” or “propitiation”. Same “hilasterion” in I John 4:10: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an *atoning sacrifice* for our sins.”

Who is doing the propitiating? God is doing it – not us. God is providing the sacrifice and making the propitiation.

“The love, the idea, the purpose, the initiative, the action and the gift were all God’s”. – Commentator

2. Who Is Providing The Propitiatory Sacrifice?

In pagan religion the answer is -- we have to bribe the gods with sweets, vegetable offerings, animals, or even human sacrifices – including the Mesopotamians, Carthaginians, Etruscans, Chinese, Celts, Aztec, and Incas.

Old Testament sacrificial system: God himself provided the means of propitiation. Leviticus 17:11: “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to

you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." -- Leviticus 17:11

The greatest Old Testament portrayal of God's provision for propitiation: Abraham and Isaac. Genesis 22:

Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." - Genesis 22:7-8

The ram caught in the thicket: God had provided the sacrifice – not Abraham. God's commendation of Abraham: "You have ... not withheld your son, your only son..."

What happened at Calvary? "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

In Christian salvation, "Who Is Doing The Propitiating?" "Who Is Providing The Propitiatory Sacrifice?" The answer is the same for both questions: God is; that's what Paul will tell us in the chapters ahead.

- In Romans 5:8, he will say, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- In Romans 8:32 he will write, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

Next time, we will see the third Greek technical term for what God did at Calvary to save us.